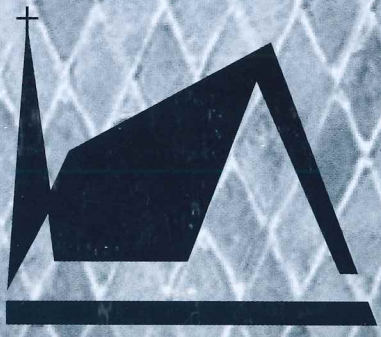
Concordia Theological Quarterly

CTQ

Vol. 67 No. 3/4
July/October
2003



CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

Concordia Theological Quarterly, a continuation of *The Springfielder*, is a theological journal of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, published for its ministerium by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Concordia Theological Quarterly is indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals* and abstracted in *Old Testament Abstracts* and *New Testament Abstracts*. *CTQ* is also indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database* (published by the American Theological Library Association, atla@atla.com, www.atla.com) and the *International Bibliography of Periodical Literature on the Humanities and Social Sciences* (www.gbv.de).

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Concordia Theological Quarterly is published in January, April, July, and October. The annual subscription rate is $15.00 within the United States, $20.00 U.S. in Canada, and $35.00 U.S. elsewhere. All changes of address, subscription payments, and other correspondence should be sent to *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 6600 North Clinton Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46825. The *Quarterly* is printed and shipped by Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, Missouri. The website is at www.ctsfw.edu/ctq/.

 • ISSN 0038-8610

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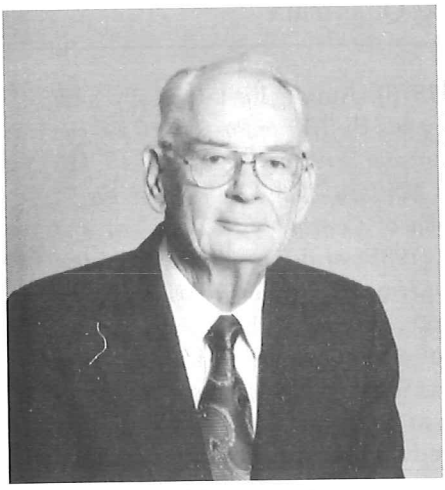

†Eugene F. A. Klug†

Long time Concordia Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Eugene F.A. Klug passed away on May 19, 2003 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He was called in 1960 as professor of systematic theology and held this position until his retirement in 1987. For many years he was the chairman of this department for many years and the faculty representative on the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Dr. Klug played a prominent part at the 1973 Denver Convention of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod in defining the synod's theology in the face of its new definition espoused by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. Just before that convention, he provided an extensive critique of that faculty's theological position, *Faithful to Our Calling, Faithful to our Lord* in *The Springfielder* (37:1 [June 1973], 67-74.)

His major scholarly interest was Luther's studies, as a summary of his extensive bibliography below shows.. He was born in Milwaukee on Nov. 26, 1917, and graduated from Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. During those years he was the assistant to Theodore Engelder, author of *The Scriptures Cannot Be Broken*. His uncle was Walter W. F. Albrecht, the translator of Francis Pieper's three volume *Christian Dogmatics*. He studied at Concordia College, Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin, Marquette University; the University of Illinois; the Lutheran School of Theology (Chicago); and Washington University (Saint Louis) and received an M. A. from the University of Chicago, and the D. Theol. from the Free University of Amsterdam in 1971. Upon graduation from Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, he served as instructor at Concordia College, Milwaukee and then in World War II he was a U. S. Navy chaplain. He was pastor at Calvary Lutheran University Church, Madison, Wisconsin, and in Kalispell, Montana, where he spent his summers after coming to the seminary. From 1955-1960, Dr. Klug served as the Lutheran chair of religion at the University of Illinois (Champaign) and after coming to the seminary, then in Springfield, Illinois, he continued to teach there part time until 1966. Upon retirement in 1987 he maintained an office on the Fort Wayne seminary campus where he indulged his passion for Luther studies. His numerous writings are a living memorial to him and his contribution to the synod. Articles on a wide range of subjects can be found in *Concordia Theologicals Quarterly*, *The Springfielder*, *The Lutheran Witness*, and other journals, domestic and foreign. He contributed to *Church and State under God* (1965), *Anden Og Kirken* (*Spirit and the Churches*, 1979), *Von der wahren Einheit der Kirche* (*On the True Unity of the Church*, 1973), *Theology of the Formula of Concord* (1978), *Church and State under God* (1964), and *A*

Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord (1978). Among his books of which he is the sole author are *Church and Ministry and the Role of Pastor and People: From Luther to Walther; From Luther to Chemnitz on Scripture and the Word; Lift High the Cross; Lord I've Been Thinking The Military Chaplaincy under the 1st Amendment* (1967), *Getting into the Formula of Concord* (1977), *Word and Scripture in Luther Studies since World War II* (1985), and *Church and Ministry:* In addition, he was the translator of Luther's sermons, *The House Postils* (Baker Books, 1996). Dr. Klug is survived by his wife, Dorothy, who resides in Fort Wayne, two daughters and two sons, one of whom, the Rev. Timothy Klug is a Lutheran pastor. His funeral was held at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on Thursday, May 22, at 11:00 a.m. Professor Klug had an illustrious career and will be remembered by his many students and his colleagues for his many years of service to the seminary, his contribution to the confessional health of the synod and his scholarly achievements. "Blessed are those who die in the Lord and their works do follow them."

David P. Scaer, Editor

Nineteenth Annual Symposium on Exegetical Theology

"Echoes of Scripture in the Life of the Church"

Tuesday, January 20, 2004

Part I: Engaging the Writings of Richard B. Hays

9:00 a.m.	Welcome Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, President and Professor of Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary
9:05 a.m.	"The Faith of Christ," Dr. Arthur A. Just Jr., Professor of Exegetical Theology and Dean of the Chapel, Concordia Theological Seminary (Response by Dr. Hays)
10:00 a.m.	Chapel
10:30 a.m.	Coffee Break
11:00 a.m.	"Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul," Dr. Charles A. Gieschen, Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary (Response by Dr. Hays)
11:50 a.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	"Can the Gospels Teach Us How to Read the Old Testament?" Dr. Richard B. Hays, George Washington Ivey Professor of New Testament, The Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (Response by Dr. Peter J. Scaer)
2:15 p.m.	"The Moral Vision of the New Testament," Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, Professor of Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary (Response by Dr. Hays)
3:00 p.m.	Questions and Panel Discussion (Dr. David P. Scaer, Moderator)
3:40 p.m.	Coffee Break
4:00 p.m.	Vespers
4:20 p.m.	Exegetical Paper Sectionals
5:30 p.m.	Dinner

Wednesday, January 21, 2004

Part II: More on "the Moral Vision"

8:00 a.m.	"Commendation and Condemnation: Ethics in 1-2 Kings," Dr. Walter A. Maier III, Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary

8:45 a.m.	"YHWH as the God of Peace and the God of War," Dr. Daniel L. Gard, Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, Concordia Theological Seminary
9:30 a.m.	Questions and Discussion (Dr. William C. Weinrich, moderator)
10:00 a.m.	Chapel
10:30 a.m.	Coffee Break
11:00 a.m.	"The Moral Vision of Proverbs," Dr. Andrew E. Steinmann, Associate Professor of Theology and Hebrew, Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois
11:50 a.m.	Lunch

Twenty-seventh Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions

"The Trinity in Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspective"

Wednesday, January 21, 2004

1:00 p.m.	Organ Recital Kantor Jonathan R. Mueller, St. John Lutheran Church, Wheaton, Illinois
1:45 p.m.	Introduction and Welcome
2:00 p.m.	"The Patristic Doctrine of the Trinity," Dr. William C. Weinrich, Professor of Historical Theology and Academic Dean, Concordia Theological Seminary
2:45 p.m.	"Theopaschites: Ancient and Modern," Dr. David R. Maxwell, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana
3:35 p.m.	"The Trinity in Contemporary Theology," Prof. John T. Pless, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Concordia Theological Seminary
4:45 p.m.	Schola Cantorum: Kramer Chapel Kantor Richard C. Resch, Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Concordia Theological Seminary
5:30 p.m.	Dinner

Thursday, January 22, 2004

8:30 a.m.	"God in Colonial New England: Trinitarianism and Unitarianism," Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr., Associate Professor of Historical Theology and Assistant Academic Dean, Concordia Theological Seminary
9:30 a.m.	Seminary Announcements
10:00 a.m.	Chapel
10:30 a.m.	Coffee Break
11:00 a.m.	"The Trinity and Feministic Issues," Dr. Peter R. Schemm Jr., Assistant Professor of Theology, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina
11:55 p.m.	Alumni Lunch with President Wenthe, Luther Hall
12:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 p.m.	"Sacraments and Inspiration in Trinitarian Perspective," Dr. David P. Scaer, Chairman, Department of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary
2:30 p.m.	"The Bible and the Trinity," Dr. Robert W. Jenson, Center of Theological Research, Princeton, New Jersey
5:30 p.m.	Symposium Buffet Reception, Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum, Auburn, Indiana

Friday, January 23, 2004

9:00 a.m.	"The Doctrine of the *Filioque* with Liturgical Perspective," The Right Reverend V'yacheslav Horpynchuk, Bishop, Ukrainian Lutheran Church
10:00 a.m.	"Natural Knowledge of God and the Trinity," Prof. Roland F. Ziegler, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary
11:00 a.m.	*Itinerarium*
12:00 p.m.	Lunch

Confessing the Trinity Today

Introduction to Papers from the 2003 LCMS Theology Professors' Convocation Papers

Who is the only true God?

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord, our God, the Lord is one!" Deut. 6:4

"There is no other God but one." 1 Cor. 8:4

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matt. 28:19

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Cor. 13:14

This is what we believe, teach, and confess concerning God.

> In the first place, it is with one accord taught and held, following the decree of the Council of Nicea, that there is one divine essence which is named God and truly is God. But there are three persons in the same one essence, equally powerful, equally eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, undivided, unending, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all visible and invisible things. What is understood by the word "person" is not a part nor a quality in another but that which exists by itself, as the Fathers once used the word concerning this issue.
>
> Rejected, therefore, are all the heresies that are opposed to this article, such as the Manichaeans, who posited two gods, one good and one evil; the Valentinians, the Arians, the Eunomians, the Mohammedans, and all others like them; also the Samosatenians, old and new, who hold that there is only one person and create a deceitful sophistry about the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, by saying that the two need not be two distinct persons since "Word" means an external word or voice and the "Holy Spirit" is a created motion in all creatures.[1]

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod theology professors—called, ordained, and full-time at the seminaries and universities/colleges—convened in Dallas, Texas, on 7-9 March 2003. "Confessing the Trinity Today" was the theme for this first Theology Professors' Convocation. The

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[1]Augsburg Confession, Article I. *Concerning God* in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press): 36. Hereafter referred to as *The Book of Concord.*

convocation was convened for the purpose of theological discussion and joint work on theological issues for the benefit of the church.

Twelve major papers were presented, representing perspectives from the biblical narrative in the Old Testament and the New Testament, from the church fathers, the Lutheran Confessions, and Luther, from contemporary theology and philosophic considerations, relating the trinitarian faith to worship and the current context. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* offers most of the major papers as a contribution to the life of the church, engendering thoughtful reflection on the subject of all theology, the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The witness of the Holy Scriptures to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is solid and firm. One who believes otherwise about God stands outside the church of Christ. Luther succinctly expresses the doctrine of the Trinity in the Large Catechism as he explains the Creed:

> For in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love. For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy, and, moreover, having granted and bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has also given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. For, . . . we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.[2]

Our faith is one God in three Persons. Accordingly, Martin Luther asked us to begin each day under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and to end each day under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are baptized under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Living in baptismal grace we receive absolution under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At confirmation we confess before the Church the Trinitarian faith into which we were baptized. Receiving the Lord's Supper we are strengthened and preserved by the body and blood of our Lord in the true faith. In marriage we are pronounced husband and wife under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Called to serve in the pastoral office the candidate is ordained and

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[2]Large Catechism, Second Part: The Creed: 64-65 in *The Book of Concord.*

consecrated under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At our burials our bodies will be committed to the ground under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Confessing the Trinity today makes it possible for us to face up to anything the day or night might bring. We begin afresh each morning and close each day in peace because we are baptized in the name of the Triune God. God is in every moment of life for us.

I bind unto myself today The strong name of the Trinity

By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three.[3]

L. Dean Hempelmann, S. T. M., Ph. D.
Director of Pastoral Education
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Advent I 2003

[Convocation funded by The Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation]

[3]Hymn #172 in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982).

Confessing the Trinitarian Gospel

Charles P. Arand

The renewed interest in the Trinity during the twentieth century resulted in part from the fear that the Trinity had become all but irrelevant to the faith and piety of many Christians. It has been asked, "if one eliminated the Father and the Spirit would it have any impact upon the average person's piety as long as they had Jesus?" Stanley Grenz has suggested that a Jesu-Unitarianism probably characterizes the actual faith of many American evangelicals. This is simply an indication that the doctrine of the Trinity seems isolated from doctrine and life rather than as a way of confessing the very being of God by means of the biblical story of his activity in and with His people. The challenge of trinitarian theology in the twentieth century was to correct that deficiency and once again identify the relevance of the Trinity for theology and piety.

One of the important contributions that the contemporary debate has made to the doctrine of the Trinity lies in its rediscovery of the so-called economic Trinity as a way of recovering the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the structure of salvation history. The charge was leveled that many people had come to think of the Trinity in primarily ontological terms, that is, they conceived of the Trinity in terms of the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit apart from their work within the world. As a result, the Trinity can only viewed as a mystery about which we can say nothing. Dorothy Sayers suggested that the average churchgoer might answer: "The Father is incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the whole thing incomprehensible." This has led to a resurgence of interest in statements about the economic Trinity. But often happens, the pendulum swings too far in the opposite direction. Thus in reaction, we have witnessed the tendency to collapse the ontological Trinity into the economic Trinity as theologians worked out the ramifications of Rahner's rule, "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity."

The Lutheran Confessions never really lost the distinction even though they may not use that terminology. However, we may not have always seen it or appreciated the distinction as such. In particular, the ecumenical creeds move from economic language of the Trinity to ontological language of the Trinity in order to confess that salvation is the work of God Himself. The Reformation confessions move build on the ontological language of the Trinity while retrieving the economic language in order to confess that salvation is not only the work of God Himself, but that it is God's nature to save. Put another way, the heart of God is Gospel. Herein we can make a contribution to the current

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The Rev. Dr. Charles P. Arand is Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

discussion. Namely, the doctrine of the Trinity is not given as a model for human relationships within society or the church. It is revealed in order to show us the depths of love of God for us in Christ Jesus.

The Creedal Contribution: It is God who Saves

When we turn to the Creeds, we will see that they utilize both patterns (economic and immanent) of speaking about Christ within the Trinity. The Apostles' Creed replicates simply and straightforwardly the biblical narrative of the New Testament. The Nicene Creed continues that economic pattern, but its *homoousios* marks the transition from the economic language to ontological language of intra-divine coequal hypostases (GC, 71). The Athanasian Creed completes that transition but takes it in a decidedly western direction.

Apostles' Creed – Nicene Creed

Trinitarian reflection in the New Testament and in the three centuries leading up to Nicea generally considered the Trinity within the framework of the threefold structure (*oikonomia*) of salvation. This means that it focused attention on the way in which the three persons (Father, Son, Spirit) manifested themselves in our world soteriologically (Eph 1:3-14; Gal 4). The economic Trinity has several characteristics. First, discussion began with the three persons and then proceeds to their unity. Second, the words "God" and "Father" are used synonymously. Third, the Father provided the focal point for the unity of the three persons. All things proceed *A Patre ad Patre.* As Gregory of Nazianzus expressed it, "All action which comes upon the Creature from God...begins with the Father and is present through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit." This approach is taken up in both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

The Apostles' Creed speaks of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and focuses on their *opera ad extra.* The three persons are considered within a cosmological (activity within the world) framework rather than an ontological (very nature and being of God) framework. The Father is identified with creation. The Son is identified by his incarnation, death, and resurrection. The Spirit is confessed alongside the church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Hence the Creed has a trinitarian structure (three articles) with a christological extension (the second article is the longest). Within the Creed's framework there is a movement from creation through redemption to the consummation of all things.

While the Apostles' Creed speaks of three persons along with their *opera ad extra,* there is virtually no mention of their ontological unity. In the Apostles' Creed, the word "God" does not refer to an abstract divine essence, but to a concrete person within the narrative. God is simply identified with the Father.

"I believe in God the Father, Almighty." This use of the word G-o-d reflects the dominant usage of the word in the New Testament.[1] The only place where a link is mentioned between the three persons appears in the second article. There it confesses that Jesus Christ is the Father's "only son" and "is conceived by the Spirit." The first phrase identifies Jesus with the Creator over and against gnosticism's separation of the two with its resultant disparagement of the creaturely. The latter confesses the miracle of the incarnation and points toward the redemption of creation.

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

Rooted in a baptismal creed, the Nicene Creed follows the Apostles' Creed in stressing the priority and prominence of the three persons revealed in history (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) over the unity of an eternal divine essence. Like the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed uses the word "God" with reference to the Father. It confesses, we believe in "one God, the Father Almighty." The phrase "one God" does not refer the unity of Godhead in the Trinity, but reproduces the language of 1 Cor 8 as is seen in the parallel phrase, "one Lord Jesus Christ" in the second article. Third, it makes more explicit than the Apostles' Creed the unity of the three persons is located in the Father. It is the Father who creates, the Son is the one "through whom all things are made."[2]

The challenge posed by Arius shifted the trinitarian discussion away from the economy of salvation to the ontology of God's existence. Since the Son is begotten (that is, created-Arius) by the Father, the Son must be less than the Father in his being. Thus while tracking with the economic way of speaking about God, the Nicene Creed transitions to an immanent way of speaking about God in order to confess the co-equality of the three persons. In other words, the Nicene Creed not only speaks about the three person with respect to their activity within salvation history, it also speaks about the three persons with respect to their eternal intra-divine relations in order to confess their full deity. The Nicene Creed attempts to do so in a way that is congruent with Scripture's pattern of words. Yet its response opened the door to another way of confessing the Trinity, namely, the immanent or ontological Trinity.

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[1]For example, "One God" refers to the Father in Acts 7:40; 14:11; 19:26; 1 Cor. 8:5; Gal. 4:8. "Only God" refers to the Father in John 5:44; 17:3; Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 1:25. "One God" refers to the Father in Mark 2:7; 10:18; 12:29-32; Luke 18:19; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19. Why assign that word to the Father preeminently? In 1 Cor. 8, the "one God" is contrasted with many gods. It is used over and against idolatry. This goes to the importance of creation as well.

[2]The creation of all things establishes the difference between creator and creation. Both creeds identify the Father as Creator and Ruler of all things in accord with the Old Testament's way of identifying and defining deity.

To that end, the second article focuses on what does it mean for the Son to be "begotten" (John 3:16) from the Father? It means the Son has his origin in the Father. Each of the phrases, God from God, light from light, very God from very God, begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father were intended to confess what it means to be "begotten," namely, it does not mean to be created! So also the Spirit finds his origin in the Father as one who "proceeds from the Father." As the Son is "begotten" and just so not created, so the Spirit "goes forth" from God otherwise than by being created but also "in some other way than by being begotten"! (The insertion of the of *filioque* in the ninth century upsets the nice symmetry).

As a result of Nicea, the self-relatedness of God moved to the forefront of theological reflection [LaCugna, 54]. Still rooted in economy, its emphasis was different in that it concentrated on the inner life of God and addressed the question, "how do the three persons relate to one another"? And so it focuses on the inter-Trinitarian relations. The language of *homoousios* paved the way for a shift of focus from the Father as the locus of unity to the one divine essence that is common to all three persons. By the fourth century, Christian theologians had concluded: The divine *ousia* exists as three distinct *hypostases*. By the fifth century Western reflection will begin with the one essence.

From the Nicene to the Athanasian Creed

Following Nicea, the Eastern church and Western church developed their trinitarian talk in different directions. Athanasius and the Cappadocians (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa) in the second half of the fourth century charted out the theological trajectories of Nicea that reached their pinnacle in the thought of John of Damascus in the eighth century. Augustine in the fifth century charted out the theological direction for the western tradition that was refined and developed by Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Both traditions agreed on the intra-Trinitarian vocabulary (unbegotten, begotten, and proceeding), but adopted different strategies for speaking about the *opera ad extra* in or world as the work of one divine agency. The east maintained the ontological priority of person and thus expressed the *opera ad extra* as the mutual work of all three persons. "All action that impacts the creature from God...begins with the Father and is actual through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. Augustine began with the ontological priority not of the person, but of the divine essence. Thus he worked from the axiom that God is simple and affirmed, "Whatever...is said of God is said of the Father, the Son and the spirit triply, and equivalently of the Trinity (J 111).

In so far as the Athanasian Creed is a western Creed it reflects Augustine's theology. One can see the Augustinian influence with the critical phrase: what the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. It follows this pattern for both the attributes and titles. Significantly, in the previous creeds,

the words "Almighty" and "God" were used to speak about the Father. Similarly, the word "Lord" was used in the previous two creeds to speak about the Son. But here in the Athanasian Creed, they are not used exclusively for one person over the others. Now each of these titles is interchangeable. Hence, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Spirit is Lord, yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord.

Summary

The economic and immanent Trinity both capture important biblical thoughts. Both approaches deal with the same God: first in his works within the world and then in his essence. The direction for trinitarian talk from the Apostles' through the Athanasian Creed moves from a dominance of economic statements to immanent statements about the Trinity. There was little choice. Without the ontological formulations of the Trinity, the economic language of God's work within the world would be evacuated of its soteriological value.

This is best seen in the struggle for the Gospel surrounding the Nicene Creed. All of the anti-Nicene factions sought to provide a semi-divine savior who could "stoop down" to us and suffer while God Himself remains free from such contamination. The Father was really God and Son could be considered "God" in that He is closely, extremely closely, or even infinitely closely associated with God. The Nicene Creed differentiated the God of the Gospel from the God of Hellenistic culture by affirming that the true God does not stand apart from history immune and untouched by history. He neither needs, nor does He provide, a semi-divine mediator of access to Him. He gives Himself. As a result, the Nicene Creed lays out two narratives (with two nativities) for Christ—one outside of time ("only begotten Son of God"), one within time ("who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven").[3] Both are necessary for Gospel to be Gospel, namely, that in Christ we encounter the saving work of God Himself.

Thus the Nicene Creed shifted the focus to the ontological Trinity with its confession of the eternal narrative/nativity of the Son of God and its significance for us (in Christ we encounter the saving work of God Himself). In doing so, however, it equipped the Reformation with the ontological foundation for reconstructing the biblical narrative regarding the work of the Trinity within the economy of salvation. In doing so, the Reformation could draw out the soteriological signficance of the Nicene Confession for the work of Christ in which we not only encounter God, but we encounter the loving heart of the Father.

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[3]Athanasius refers to these as the *scopus* of Scripture.

The Reformation Contribution: From Ontology to Economy

The distinctively Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century can be read as recovering the biblical pattern for speaking about the Trinity. What Albrecht Peters observed about Luther in the catechisms holds true for the Lutheran Confessions in general. They reached back behind the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition (Peters, 40) to retrieve a biblical way of confessing the Trinity. They did not do so for the purpose of finding a model for intra-human relationships within society, but for the purpose of confessing the Gospel. In other words, the economic Trinity takes us to the very heart of the Father. Not only does God save, but it appropriate and proper that He saves. It is his nature to do so. This is the righteousness of God.

It is this soteriological purpose of God's revelation as Trinity that gets picked up and carried by the distinctively Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century. Both kinds of language, the ontological and economic, are used to convey the Trinity. But the ontological serves as the foundation for soteriology; the economic Trinity provided the framework for soteriology. The Reformation assumed the ontological Trinity as the background and proceeded to recapture statements about economic Trinity. Thus AC I uses the language of the Athanasian Creed before moving to the economic language of AC III. Similarly, Part I of the Smalcald Articles confesses the trinitarian substance of the creeds before moving on to the soteriological implications in Part II, namely, "Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, was handed over for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

In emphasizing the soteriological implications of the Trinity, the Reformation deepened the insights it inherited from the early church. As Paul Althaus points out, Luther finds not only the divine in the person and work of Jesus Christ, he finds the Father Himself. Jesus and the Father are held so firmly together that we learn to think of God only in Jesus Christ. This can be demonstrated in a number of ways, especially in the extensive discussion on justification in which Jesus reconciles us to the Father. This is perhaps most succinctly expressed in Luther's catechetical writings that culminated in the Large Catechism. Here we see first a confession of the three persons followed by a summary of their unity rooted in their soteriological work.

We can see both immanent-Trinitarian and economic-Trinitarian statements within two paragraphs of "Luther's Brief Explanation of 1520," where Luther first makes an immanent-Trinitarian statement followed by an economic-trinitarian statement: "not only" (immanent-Trinitarian statement) I believe "but also" (economic-Trinitarian statement).

According to this pattern, Luther develops his thinking in the Second Article concerning Jesus as the Son God in the following way: "I do *not only*

believe that this means that Jesus Christ is the one true Son of God, begotten of him in eternity with one eternal divine nature and essence—*but* I also believe that the Father has made all things subject to him, that according to his human nature he has been made one Lord over me and all things which he created together with the Father in his divinity."

The same thought and formula carries over into the Third Article on the the Spirit: "I believe *not only* what this means—that the Holy Spirit is truly God together with the Father and the Son—*but* also that except through the Holy Spirit's work no one can come in and to the Father through Christ and his life, his suffering and death, and all that is said of him, nor can anyone appropriate any of this to himself."

Of the two approaches to the Trinity, the catechisms focus less on the intra-trinitarian relations of the three persons within the one divine essence, Luther concentrates on the Trinity's self-turning toward the world.[4]

In order to set forth who God is and what kind of a God He is, Luther reorganized the Creed from twelve articles (corresponding to the twelve apostles) to its original three articles without altering the wording so that he could concentrate on the saving work of the Triune God and emphasize the *pro nobis* character of God's work in all aspects life. This occurred in two stages. First, in 1520, Luther correlated the three articles to the three persons of the Trinity. Each article then tells "about one of the three persons of the Holy and divine Trinity. The first—the Father; the second the Son, and the third, the Holy Spirit" (1520:24). Second, Luther correlated the three articles of the Creed not only to the three persons, but to the particular gifts and works of each person. This theme comes out most prominently in his 1528-1529 writings, during which period, he attaches the captions, "creation, redemption, sanctification" to each article and thereby makes them the leading motifs for the three articles.[5]

So, how does Luther deal with the unity? The First Article in the Large Catechism offers a glimpse of what is to come. "These words give us a brief description of God the Father, his nature, his will, and his work" (LC II, 10).

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[4]Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen,* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), II:39.

[5]Cf. Peters, *Kommentar,* II:37. The captions for the First and Second Articles are fairly obvious, but less so for the Third Article. Luther first uses the caption "sanctification" in the Visitation Articles. In the Third Article Luther had to contend with five disparate items and bring them into an organic unity. The Second Article seems to have provided the key as seen in his Sermon on 10 December 1528. As the individual items of the Second Article dealt with the person and work of Christ, so Luther took the individual items of the Third Article and identifed them with the work of the Spirit.

These words proleptically draw attention to the conclusion of the Third Article where he picks up the trinitarian issue in a way that surpasses all previous explanations.[6] Here Luther concludes, "Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words" (LC II, 63). For Luther God's essence and will expresses itself in his all encompassing care.[7] All three articles reveal the fatherly heart of God and thus teach us to *know* God perfectly. In the conclusion to the explanation of the Creed, Luther looks back upon the whole Creed and explains:

> In these three articles *God* himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his *fatherly* heart, his sheer, unutterable love. *He* created us for his very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, *he* has given us his Son and *his* Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit (LC II, 64-65).
>
> All who are outside the Christian church, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the *one, true God,* nevertheless do not know what this attitude is toward them,. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing. Therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit (LC II, 66).

"Hereby the catechism brings the works of the Trinity into a unity. The works of the Trinity cannot be lined up alongside one another in such a way that they stand as three isolated and disparate events. The work of any given person is always seen in relation to the work of the other two persons. And so the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit are not considered in and of themselves, but are seen entirely in the light of the Trinitarian faith" (Jansen, 84) for there exists an intimate interdependence, one might even say a mutual dependence among their works. When we encounter Christ and the Spirit, we encounter God himself—but this God is for Luther the Father.[8]

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[6]Reiner Jansen, *Die Trinität in Luters Auslegungen des Apostolikums 1520-29: Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre* (Frankfurt: n. p., 1976), 72.

[7]Peters, *Kommentar,* II:67-68.

[8]Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre,* 63.

Luther gives the Creed a narrative that proceeds from the Father (*A Patre*) by noting that God has created us in order to redeem us and sanctify us. The purpose for which God continues to create and sustain us, continues to protect and defend us in spite of sin, is that we might be saved. In a sense, the First Article stabilizes the patient and wheels him into the operating room of the Second and Third Articles where the disease is diagnosed and destroyed. The Second and Third Articles assumes the introduction of sin into the God's creation and thus focuses on God's gift of his Son for the world to rescue us from the domination of sin. Finally, the Third Article presupposes the work of Christ, particularly, his death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit carries out the work of implementing, administrating, and bringing to fulfillment the reign of Christ.

Luther also gives the Creed a simultaneous narrative that returns to the Father (*Ad Patrem*). Here the Father provides the terminus *ad quem* of the trinitarian work. This ordering answers the question, "for what purpose did God carry out his work in all three articles?" What is the goal of creation, redemption, and sanctification? Simply put, all three persons, together with their works, bring us back to the Father. All three works, creation, redemption, and sanctification, lead us to the fatherly heart of God. We find God's gracious fatherly heart only through the Son, to whom the Spirit alone leads us.[9] The Spirit leads us to the Father through Christ who has reconciled us to the Father.

In the Creed, Luther has a simple goal: He wants "to get to the bottom of what God has done, is doing, and can be expected to do for us."[10] The strength of Luther's presentation of the Trinity in the catechism is how each person of the Trinity plays an active and vital role within our lives. By connecting the three articles to the three persons and their works, the catechisms show that the "Giver and gift belong together; neither can be understood without the other."[11] Each plays a role that together they embrace the totality of our life in such a way that we cannot treat the Trinity as an item that we are to know about, but as three persons who give us a true knowledge of God Himself.

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[9]Peters, *Kommentar*, II:39.

[10]Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching* (Hutchinson, Minn.: Crown Publishing, 1992).

[11]Herbert Girgensohn, *Teaching Luther's Catechism* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), I:129.

Conclusion

The Creeds give us several strategies for speaking about the Triune story in order to proclaim the Gospel depending on the challenges we face. The Apostles' Creed offers the simplest and most straightforward pattern. It utilizes both biblical terminology and a biblical pattern that embraces the unity of Scripture from creation to the last day. The Nicene Creed also speaks of the Trinity in the economic language of Scripture. However, in order to preserve Gospel as the work of God over and against Arianism, it utilizes the biblical language of the narrative in order to confess the ontological Trinity. The Athanasian Creed perhaps provides the surest defense against tritheism and subordinationism but at the potential cost of distancing the trinitarian dogma from the biblical narrative. So, how do we proclaim the Triune narrative of the Gospel today?

The Reformation Confessions offer some helpful guidance. It is worth noting that the economic narrative of the Apostles' Creed is picked up and expounded in the Small and Large Catechisms. This narrative also provides the economical/soteriological framework for AC 2, 3, and 5. It is picked up again in FC 1. The Athanasian Creed, on the other hand, appears in AC 1, Apology 1, and the Smalcald Articles. One might say that with respect to the task of proclamation and catechesis, the Lutheran Confessions draw upon the biblical pattern of the Apostles' Creed. But when it comes to the need for theological precision or the legal definition of catholicity (Theodosian code), they turn to the Athanasian Creed. So, what does this mean?

First, in order to develop a trinitarian consciousness, one must begin with the economic Trinity as found in the Apostles' and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. In part this is because the ontological questions of a Hellenistic culture are not as prominent today. In part because this is the biblical pattern of the Gospel. The economic language for the Trinity allows us to revel in the particularities of the three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. It allows us to revel in their works. It shapes our piety and prayer. God is a particular God, namely, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It provides us with a way of relating the works of the three persons so as not to distort one through an over emphasis. Here we need to do much exploration and study of the biblical record. It is interesting that as a rule, the Father sends the Son and Spirit. The Father justifies and forgives. The Son comes from the Father and carries out the will of the Father. The Son does not reconcile us to Himself. Instead the Son reconciles us to the Father. He turns aside the wrath of God. He is the Mediator. What about the Spirit? On the one hand Christ is bearer and sender of the Spirit. On the other hand, the Spirit is another comforter. The Spirit pushes forward the mission of Christ. He brings the Word of God into the world through incarnation. Leads Him to do battle in the wilderness. He

raises Christ from the dead. Spirit proclaims Christ and brings us to Christ. What about prayers and benedictions. Pay attention to the economic pattern of events in the Gospel story.

Second, one cannot avoid ontological talk about the Trinity. To speak thus about God the Father will raise questions about the deity of the Son and Spirit as well as their unity. Moreover, prevalent heresies and errors are often shown to be such only by speaking of what we know of God in his essence, that is, ontological Trinity. Here it is necessary for teachers and preachers to have the intellectual facility to move from the economic to the ontological Trinity and back gain in order rightly to defend the Faith. Practically, speaking, this means that teachers and preachers must be wholly familiar with the various strategies for confessing the Trinity as found in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

How do we move from discussion of one to the other? Here I am partial to the Nicene Creed. In that connection, I might pick up what is known as Rahner's rule: the economic Trinity is the economic Trinity. Lately it has been used to virtually collapse the ontological Trinity into the economic Trinity. This raises the danger of pantheism. Others have used it in order to turn the Trinity into paradigm for ethics, society, and churchly community. Because God is like this. . .the world should be like this as well (xix). This, however, runs the danger of again distancing or removing the Trinity from the Gospel narrative. But it does at least suggest that the triune narrative as our story provides us with a glimpse of the triune narrative as God's story. A glimpse is just that. We must also speak of the hidden God. The mystery of salvation is tied to the mystery of the Trinity.

In this regard, I believe it may be most helpful to use the strategy provided by the Niceno-Constantantinopolitan Creed and the Cappadocians. It works more explicitly from the economic to the ontological Trinity. That is to say, there is something appropriate about the Father as unbegotten and source of the Trinity as the Father as the one who sends the Son and Spirit into the World. There is a connection between the Son being begotten and being born. The Son has two nativities! There is a connection between the Spirit's procession and the Spirit's mission in the world. The same applies to their unity. That is, it begins with the Father through the Son and in the Spirit and returns to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. The Cappadocians spoke of the perichoretic unity. To what extent does their relation in the structure of salvation tell us something about their inner life? If the Father is defined by relation to the Son and vice versa, can the same be said of the Son and Spirit? Does the role of the spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus say anything about the unity of the Son and Spirit in the Godhead? The early church focused on a Trinity of origins. From the future? Eschatology plays a

significant role in the biblical narrative. Can same be said of ontological Trinity?

Finally, in an increasingly pluralistic culture, Christians will carry on conversations with adherents of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. It will be tempting to speak of God more as a generic deity than to talk about the Trinity. After all, the "G-o-d" word establishes a certain "common ground" between the faiths. Consider the recent prayer service last Friday. The opening invocation intoned, "O God of David, Mohammed, and our Lord Jesus Christ." God seems to be the real substratum behind the various iterations of the different faiths. What about inter-faith dialogues? Where do we begin our discussion. Should we begin discussion about "God" or about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Can one begin with the former without immediately speaking of the latter? If we begin with the latter do we immediately cut off all further dialogue?

Within the culture at large, the word "God" most often involves an undeveloped sense, conviction, or idea of God that is probably nearer to pantheism (world is God) or panentheism (world is contained in God) than to classical monotheism (Toon, 17). C.S. Lewis, in his book *Miracles*, wrote, "We who defend Christianity find ourselves constantly opposed not by the irreligion of our hearers but by their *real* religion. Speak about ... a great spiritual force pervading all things, a common mind of which we are all parts, a pool of generalized spirituality to which we can all flow, and you will command friendly interest. But the temperature drops as soon as you mention a God who has purposes and performs a *particular* action, who does one thing and not another, a concrete, choosing, commanding, prohibiting God with a determinate character. People become embarrassed or angry" (Lewis, 99). The trend in theism today is away from speaking of God's transcendence and toward speaking of his immanence. Yet pantheism often results from bringing God too close to the world. Thus we must become more explicit in our God-talk so that we speak of God in a distinctively Christian way, that is, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Speaking of the Triune God: Augustine, Aquinas, and the Language of Analogy

John F. Johnson

Introduction

The decision to focus this initial LCMS Professors of Theology Convocation on the doctrine of the Trinity evidences the fundamental fact that confessional Lutheran theology is, at its very heart, trinitarian theology. The Trinity is most intimately related to the Gospel of salvation as a work of God rather than a work of human beings. Apart from Christ, we can know nothing of the grace of God the Father (Matt. 11:27), and apart from the Holy Spirit we cannot come to know Christ (John 16:13).

In order to claim this truth and prevent a lapse into a deficient "Jesus only" theological orientation, one must confess the full scriptural revelation of God's being in character as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For, after all, "this is the true Christian faith, that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God without confusing the persons or dividing the divine substance" (Athanasian Creed 3-4). This one God *is* the God of the Gospel.

However, it is the case that the confession of the Triune God is the confession of an ineffable mystery which goes to the issue of theological language. Harvard theologian Gordon Kaufmann has argued that the fundamental problem in articulating a meaningful doctrine of the trinitarian God in today's world is semantical or linguistic. Is there any reality at all to which the word "God" refers? Is all talk about Him not, in the strict sense, cognitively meaningless?[1] Concurring in Kaufmann's judgment is Langdon Gilkey of the University of Chicago who warns that the

> radical questioning of the Foundation's religious affirmation and so of the theological language reflective of it, is now taking place within and not outside of the church. Heretofore in this century, the radical questioning of religious beliefs was a characteristic of the secular world outside the church. . . . In the present crisis, however, one finds not only concerned laymen wondering about the usage and meaning of religious language; even more one encounters theologians questioning whether it is any longer to speak intelligently of God.[2]

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[1]Gordon Kaufmann, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 1972), 7.

[2]Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind:The Renewal of God-language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 16.

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In the orthodox Christian tradition, the nature, work, and words of God were understood as expressible in doctrinal formulations as references or to a reality as objective as that to which ordinary descriptions referred. The metaphysical structure of orthodox theology had justified valid, common sense assertions about God, even assertions so paradoxical as that of the Athanasian Creed, "that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance." But Immanuel Kant's banishment of metaphysics to the sphere of the unknowable eventuated in an antimetaphysical theology, which, to be sure, affirmed God's existence but no longer felt confident to describe His specific nature in universally valid statements. The result is that contemporary situation described by Kaufmann and Gilkey that the task of the theologian now days is not to show that the statements, "God is triune," or, "God is gracious" are true, but to show that they are even intelligible.

The purpose of my remarks is to suggest a helpful theological resource for dealing with the contemporary problem of speaking of God at the most fundamental level. It is the employment of the language of analogy advanced by two of the most influential thinkers in the Catholic tradition—St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. I shall contend that their employment of analogy in speaking of the Triune God remains immensely relevant for the Christian confession.

I.

The trinitarian teaching of Augustine is presented in a number of his works, including the Enchiridion, *De doctrina Christina*, and in his anti-Arian writings. But in the treatise, *De Trinitate*, Augustine is not so much a controversialist as a systematic theologian. The work has two parts: the first (books 1-7) establishes the doctrine of the Trinity according to the Scriptures and the humans and nature, which illuminate the mystery. No where does he argue the teaching of the Trinity since catholic faith proposes it. He accepts catholic teaching on the coessentiality of the divine three, their distinctness, their fullness of divinity. His effort goes into its intelligibility and he uses analogies as his chief tool in this regard.

Augustine resonates to his theological predecessors who used the light of the sun or the course of a spring through a river to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity. All of nature bears the stamp of its creator according to Augustine. However, since God is Trinity, the impress of the divine nature will be discovered everywhere. The best reflection of the inner life of God is, of course, human creatures. In the introduction to his translation of *De Trinitate*, Edmund Hill writes:

> I myself find it helpful to envisage the whole of the *De Trinitate* as an Alex Through the Looking Glass exercise. We are looking-glass creatures living in a looking-glass world, which reflects the real realities of the divine world in a fragmentary manner, and back to front. In the first seven books Augustine has been discussing the language we use to talk about God *out there*, God in His own divine world, and has also investigated God's incursion into our looking-glass world by the divine missions and by revelation. But now he withdraws wholly into the looking-glass world in order to find God in His image, His reflection.[3]

Since Scripture tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God, we can know and articulate the Trinity based on our own mind or soul.

He ultimately uses a psychological analysis of the mind's own knowledge and love of itself as an analogue of the Trinity.

> Just as you have two somethings, mind and its love, when it loves itself, so you have two somethings, mind and its knowledge, when it knows itself. The mind therefore and its love and knowledge are three somethings, and these three are one thing, and when they are complete they are equal.
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> But they are in each other too, because the mind loving is in love, and love is in the knowledge of the lover, and knowledge is in the mind knowing. They are each in the other two, because the mind which knows and loves itself is in its love and knowledge, and the love of the mind loving and knowing itself is in the mind and its knowledge, and the knowledge of the mind knowing and loving itself is in the mind and its love, because it loves itself knowing and knows itself loving.
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> But with these three when mind knows and loves itself the Trinity remains of mind, love, knowledge. Nor are they jumbled up together in any kind of mixture, though they are each one in itself and each whole in their total, whether each in the other two or the other two in each, in any case all in all.[4]

Thus Augustine views mind, knowledge, and love and their interrelationships as an analogy of the coequal consubstantial Trinity.

There is also an external trinity in our sensitive life: the object seen, our outer vision and the attention of our mind. It is evil if, according to this outer trinity, which is concerned with sensible things, we use our imagination to

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[3]John E. Rotelle, ed., *The Trinity*, trans. and intro. by Edmund Hill, 4th edition (Brooklyn: New City, 1991), 5:52.

[4]Rotelle, *The Trinity*, 9.4.

engender another trinity: memory, interior vision and will. For the outer triad is not an image of God, "since it is produced in the soul through the senses of the body." However, it is not totally dissimilar because all created things are good and so reflect the goodness of God. "An image is only an expression of God in the full sense, when no other nature lies between it and God . . . the vision which takes place in the sense is mingled with something spiritual."[5] According to Augustinian scholar James Mohler, "Augustine prefers the interior threesome: memory, inner vision and will, when these are drawn together and are called thought."[6]

The analogy runs this way. When we look at an object, it is easy to distinguish these three terms: the thing seen, a stone or a flame for instance; the sight of that thing, i.e., the form impressed by the object on the organ of sight; and finally the mind's attention, which keeps the sight fastened on the object as long as the perception lasts. These three things are obviously distinct: the visible, material body taken in itself is one thing; the form it impresses on the sense organ is another; and finally, the mind's attention differs both from the unseeing body we see and the sense organ that sees it because this attention belongs to the mind alone. At the same time there is a kind of generation of vision by the object, for if there were no action exercised on the sense by the object, there would be no vision. Here then we have an example of three terms at once distinct and yet closely linked, so closely in fact that at least two of them are scarcely distinguishable.

Of course, even after the sense object is removed, its image is still present to the memory and the will can turn to it again whenever it likes to enter and contemplate it. Here we have a second trinity, another trace of God in the outer man: the recollection, the inner vision of that recollection, and the will which links them. In the first trinity, two of the three terms belonged to different substances: sensible body is a material substance utterly foreign to the order of mind, vision already belongs to the order of the soul because it presupposes an organ animated by an inner power, and the will belongs entirely to the purely spiritual order, i.e., to mind in the proper sense of the word. In the second trinity, however, the operation is like a cycle completed entirely within the soul itself. The recollection originates outside because it is the recollection of a sensation or of images made up of recollections of sensations, but once the image is acquired, the will has but to focus the attention of the soul upon it to cause knowledge and to have it last as long as it wants it to last.

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[5]Rotelle, *The Trinity*, 11.2.

[6]James A. Mohler, *A Speechless Child is the Word of God* (Brooklyn: New City, 1992), 18.

To be sure, Augustine was not deluded concerning the limitations of his various analogies. No image of God that human creatures may carry is identical with Him in the way the Son who is God's image is identical in substance with the Father. The image of the Trinity in us is not such that one could deduce the doctrine of the Trinity from it. Augustine clearly affirms the necessity of faith.

> When the final day of life reveals a man, in the midst of this progress and growth, holding steadfast to the faith of the Mediator the holy angels will await him to bring him home to the God whom he has served and by whom he must be perfected; and at the end of the world he will receive an incorruptible body, not for punishment but for glory. For the likeness of God will be perfect in this image only in the perfect vision of God: of which vision the Apostle Paul says: "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face-to-face" (1 Cor 13:12). And again: "But we with unveiled fact beholding the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the spirit of the Lord."[7]

II.

In Augustine's *Treatise on the Trinity*, which had an immense influence on the Middle Ages, scholasticism is said to have been born. Employing the language of analogy to speak of God was a significant aspect of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. As Augustine, Thomas understood that God alone is being. Everything else has being; but God's essence is identical to His existence and it is of His essence to exist. This being the case, the Triune God can only be known through analogy.

Although he makes references to talking of God throughout his works, a crucial juncture is reached in the *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question XIII, "On Naming God." How is it possible to know or to say of a reality that infinitely surpasses us that it is good, wise, incorporeal, just, etc.? In fact, how is it possible to say anything at all about it? The answer—at least for a long line of Christian theologians—lies in the *via negativa* and the *via affirmativa*, the "way of negation" and the "way of affirmation."

The way of negation endeavors to demonstrate that finally God is beyond comparison of all finite things and that by knowing the finite we can know and speak of what God is not. Approaching God (as Aquinas says we must) indirectly, we can never know the divine substance as it is in itself, but we can at least know what it is not and therefore approximate more and more to a positive, albeit incomplete, knowledge of what it is:

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[7]Rotelle, *The Trinity*, 16.17.

> Now, in considering the divine substance, we should especially make use of the method of remotion. For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not. Furthermore, we approach nearer to a knowledge of God according as through our intellect we are able to remove more and more things from him.[8]

We can establish, for instance, that God must be infinite (not finite), immutable (not changeable), incorporeal (not material, and simple non-composite). While the way of negation in this fashion advances our knowledge of the divine nature forward by denying to it certain traits found in sensible reality, the way of affirmation allows us to predicate of God other features, such as wisdom and goodness, positively and affirmatively.

This introduces a crucial concept in Thomistic thought—the *analogia entis*, the "analogy of being." According to Thomas, this is the key for rendering human language about God meaningful. Incidentally, I intentionally refrain from referring to the doctrine of analogy as Thomists commonly do. David Burrell and Norris Clarke, two contemporary Thomistic commentators, have noted that Thomas himself never developed a structural analysis of the logical form of analogy. Others organized his comments into a full-dress theory, although Thomas has become famous for it. As is frequently the case, the philosophical activity of the master became doctrine in the hands of his disciples.

What Thomas actually did was to make us aware of Aristotle's initial and rough division of expressions and their senses into univocal and equivocal. But there is a set of expressions, Aquinas said, that can be used in a fashion neither univocal nor equivocal, but somewhere in between. These expressions are those we use in positively talking of God, in calling Him by His other names revealed in Scripture—Goodness, Truth, Justice, Wisdom. These expressions he calls "analagous": "For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same; yet is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but the name which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing. . . . "[9]

Now, to ask the appropriate Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" We speak univocally (literally, naming in one way) when we apply a word with the same meaning to different things. For example, when we say, "Thomas is a man, and Bill and Ted are also," we predicate exactly the same

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[8]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q.13.
[9]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q.32.

thing of Bill and Ted as we do of Thomas. The term "man" is used univocally. But when we say, "God is good," or "Jesus loves you," are we intending to predicate "good" and "love" univocally of both God and created beings? Of course not. God cannot be good and loving in exactly the same way that Thomas, Bill, and Ted may be said to be good or loving. The goodness and love we can see in creatures is imperfect. But to talk of the goodness and love of God is to talk of perfect goodness and love. Attributing goodness and love to God is not the same as attributing goodness and love to a human person (that would be univocal or synonymous attribution and it would ultimately amount to idolatry, the blurring of the distinction between the creator and His creation).

Does this therefore mean that all talk about God is equivocal? We speak equivocally (literally, naming in like ways) when we employ a single word but intend totally different meanings. In his discussion of the *via analogiae*, Edward Miller uses the word "pen" as an example. We may employ that word at one time to mean a writing instrument and at another time a place for confining pigs. It is the same word. But do we wish to use equivocation in talking of God? While it may be true that when we say, "God is good," we do not intend that He is good in exactly the same way that we are good, we certainly do not intend either that His goodness is completely unlike and completely unrelated in any possible way to our own. That linguistic path ends in meaninglessness. Think of our people on an evangelism call: "Mr. Smith, the Bible says that God loved you so much that He sent His Son into the world to die for you. But, of course, God's love is so totally unrelated to our human love that we can have no possible idea of what it means." Our erstwhile evangelist may as well have said, "Mr. Smith, the Bible says that God 'bliked' you." If God so transcends our linguistic concepts that they have application to Him at all, then all knowledge of God and human discourse about Him would be impossible. So, although attributing goodness to God is not the same as attributing goodness to a person, neither is the goodness of God totally unrelated to the goodness of a person (that would be an equivocation).

In sum, then, in speaking of God, Thomas Aquinas is

> concerned to maintain that we can use words to mean more than they mean to us—that we can use words to "try to mean" what God is like, that we can reach out to God with our words even though they do not circumscribe what He is. The obvious objection to this is that in e.g., God is good, "good" must either mean the same as it means when applied to creatures or something different. If it means that same, then God is reduced to the level of creatures; if it does not mean the same then we cannot know what it means by knowing about creatures, we

> should have to understand God Himself; but we do not, hence we do not understand it at all – we only have an illusion of understanding because the word happens to be graphically the same as the "good" we do understand. St. Thomas wishes to break down this either-or.[10]

He does so by suggesting that we talk of God neither univocally nor entirely equivocally, but analogically. It is not true, he says, that a word must mean either exactly the same in two different uses or else mean something altogether different. There is the possibility of a word being used proportionately, with related meanings.

At the heart of the Thomistic concept of analogy is the conviction that the world stands in a real relation to God; that the creature is the effect of the Creator and in some way bears His imprint. For Thomas in particular, this conviction is rooted in his famous casual argument for the existence of God as elaborated in the first three of his five ways of proving God's existence (e.g., some things change; if anything changes there is a least one efficient cause of that change; if there is one efficient cause of change, then there is a first cause of change; the first cause is God). Causality serves as the bond of similarity between God and the world. However, one need not, it seems to me, embrace the classical Thomistic proofs. The point is that the world bears something of the perfection of its cause. Every casual bond sets up at the same time a bond of intrinsic similarity in being.

The most proper name for God is "He Who Is" (Exod. 3:14) because, posits Thomas, it best symbolizes God. "For it does not signify some form," he writes, "but being itself (*ipsum esse*). Hence, since the being of God is His very essence, it is clear that among other names this one most properly names God; for everything is named according to its essence."[11] The natural world – and we ourselves – may not be wholly like God, but neither is it wholly unlike Him. Creatures, by the very fact that they are, resemble God who is Being Itself. Analogical predication is based on just this resemblance. Thomas believed that we can acquire, through experience of God's creation, ideas of perfections such as being, goodness, and wisdom. Moreover, we can by analogy affirm these perfections of God:

> whatever is said of God and creatures is said according as there is some relation of the creature to God as to its principle and cause, wherein all the perfections of things pre-exist excellently. Now this mode of community is a mean between pure equivocation and simple

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[10]David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1979), 115.

[11]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–I, Q.2.

> univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same; yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but the name which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing. . . . [12]

For Thomas, then, all our talk of God is at best analogical. We infer His perfections from the "incomplete, fractured" perfections we see in His creation. We can speak of Him analogically only because He has made us and all beings.

If the general scheme of not univocal, not equivocal, but another category of language in talking of God strikes a familiar pose in your minds, you recall more of Francis Pieper than you might have imagined. At the outset of his treatment of the essence and attributes of God in *Christian Dogmatics*, volume one, Pieper states that in God, essence and attributes are not separate. In creatures, existence, essence, and attributes are separate and distinct entities but in God they are all identical. When we speak of the essence of a thing, we commonly mean not its physical but its metaphysical entity—what it is in terms of its being. Then we might proceed to contrast the properties or the attributes of a thing that emanate from its essence. But with God, His essence—what He is—and His attributes or qualities are one and cannot be separated.

Now if that is the case, suggests Pieper, the next question would be how can we talk about God at all. And to that point Pieper addresses himself:

> Since finite human reason cannot comprehend the infinite and absolute simplicity, God condescends to our weakness and in His Word divides Himself, as it were, into a number of attributes which our faith can grasp and to which it can cling. Scripture itself teaches us to distinguish between God's essence and His attributes when it speaks of God's love (Rom. 5:8), God's wrath (Rom. 1:18), God's long-suffering (Rom. 2:4). . . . Because God employs our human language, He has also adopted our way of thinking and accommodate Himself to the laws of human thought processes. . . . [13]

In our imperfect human way of thinking, then, we are led to conceive the divine properties or attributes as forms enveloping the already constituted essence after the manner of qualities. Further, as Pieper notes, we find that in Holy Scripture the same attributes are predicated of both God and human creatures. This, he acknowledges, seems to involve us in somewhat of a

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[12]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q.13.

[13]Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951-1953), 1:428.

difficulty, since God and His attributes are infinite, while human attributes are finite. In what manner can the same properties be ascribed both to God and to His creatures, he asks. His response sounds familiar:

> Not univocally, in the identical sense, as though the term and the matter apply to God and the creature in the same manner and degree; not equivocally, as though the terms when applied to God and to the creatures had no more in common than the sound, but in such case have an entirely different meaning; but analogically, similarly, because both being and attributes belong to God and the creatures, though not in the same manner or degree.[14]

Interestingly, Pieper never refers to Thomas Aquinas in all of this treatment of "God-talk." He does, however, explicitly cite Augustine as representing the classical concept of analogy. One can only surmise the reason for such selective "foot-noting"—it must be that Pieper too shared that insidious disease which has always afflicted our tradition of trying to make a Lutheran out of Augustine and a pagan of Aquinas.

In point of fact, Pieper's approach is in line with the classical Thomistic perspective. We speak of the divine nature in a plurality of ways because we necessarily approach God through the world of nature in which the being of God is, as it were, refracted and seen under different and varying lights; something of the divine being is reflected in the goodness that human creatures know and of which we speak, in the wisdom that we know and of which we speak, etc. If we were able to know God as He is in Himself, then we would, of course, see that the divine attributes converge into one, identical with the simple and divine nature that is the essence of God.

Finally, in terms of the Thomistic view of analogical language, it must be emphasized that he does not mean likeness, pure and simple. For Thomas, our language about God is not metaphorical. And precisely here, I think, the Thomistic elaboration is much stronger than Pieper's. I am quite sure that Pieper really understood the difference between analogy and metaphor. As an example of analogy He uses Isa. 49:15 ("Can a woman forget her suckling child . . . yet will I not forget thee"). For Thomas, analogy is more than a conception of language; it is a metaphysical doctrine.

He does not want to say simply that our language about God is metaphorical because he wants to distinguish between two different kinds of things that we say about God; between statements like "The Lord is my rock and my refuge" and statements like "God is good." The former is quite

[14]Pieper, *Dogmatics*, I:431.

compatible with its denial—"of course the Lord is not a rock," whereas the latter is not. We would not say "God is not good," though we are quite likely to say "God is good, but not in the way that we are." It is a significant point about metaphor that while we can easily say "God is not really a rock" we cannot so safely say "The Lord is not a rock in the way that Gibraltar is." There is, after all, only one way of being a rock, but more importantly, being a rock in the way that Gibraltar is what the poet has in mind. Unless we think of God as being just like Gibraltar—although of course not really being a rock—we betray the poet's meaning. However, in the case of "good," since there are in any case many ways of being good among creatures, there is nothing incongruous in saying "He is good, though not in our creaturely way." For Thomas, what makes it possible to be confident that the word "good" is in some meaning applicable to Him is that He is the cause of the goodness of creatures. In this way, creatures exhibit relatively and proportionately the perfections that exist infinitely in God. It should be noted, however, that what is epistemologically prior is metaphysically posterior. The term "good" as we know it applies first to creatures and second to God, whereas in fact goodness exists primarily in God and only derivatively or secondarily in creatures. No metaphor is the best possible metaphor. One can always say, "I don't really mean that." But some things we may say of God even though they are imperfect cannot be improved on by denying them; their imperfection lies in our human understanding of what we are trying to mean.

My proffering the Thomistic view of analogy as a viable resource for dealing with the contemporary problem of "God-talk" is not without the realization that there are substantial difficulties with his position. One of the more strident contemporary critics of the Thomistic perspective is Kai Nielsen, a widely published humanist philosopher. At the heart of every analogous concept, he insists, there must be a "common core of meaning," which in turn necessarily implies that this core of meaning must be univocal. "Common core of meaning and univocal" are co-extensive and interchangeable terms according to Nielsen. This objection, incidentally, is exactly the same as that brought against Thomistic analogy by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham shortly after the time of Thomas himself. Thomists, for the most part, admit that in some sense there must be some common core of meaning in all analogous predications of the same term; otherwise, it could not function as one term and concept. But they would maintain that this common core of meaning is not therefore univocal, it remains analogous, similar-in-difference, or diversely similar. Properly analogous terms are those that are intended to express a proportionate intrinsic similarity. Such intrinsic analogies are found in terms like "love," "unity," "being," "knowledge." We use analogous concepts in our language life to fit occasions wherein we cannot help but use them. This occurs when we notice some basic similarity-

in-difference or proportional similarity across a range of different kinds of subjects, such that the similarity we notice does not occur in the same qualitative way in each case. The similarity is not some one thing or characteristic that remains exactly the same in all cases, as it would be with univocity. It is rather that the similar property itself is more or less profoundly and intrinsically modified in a qualitatively different way each time. Still, Nielsen's contention that all analogy must be rooted in univocity constitutes a perennial objection to the Thomistic perspective. And, of course, there are others beyond the purposes of my point that Thomistic analogy is not without its problems—problems both philosophical and theological.

Even a Thomist such as David Burrell admits that "analogy" is a rather slippery term. In his excellent work *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, he writes, "Indeed, for Aquinas it seems to refer to any manner of establishing a notion too pervasive to be defined or too fundamental or exalted to be known through experience. More often than not, this is accomplished via examples designed to point up enough relevant aspects of these notions to use them responsibly."[15]

Aquinas worked in the context of belief and breathed the very air of faith. In that atmosphere, many of the problems to be raised by Hume and others (who breathed rather different air) simply did not occur. But above all, I think we should remember another dimension of the Thomistic atmosphere Burrell neglected to mention. Thomas worked in the context of the word. In the Holy Scriptures, Thomas said, "the Word of the eternal Father, comprehending everything by His own immensity, has willed to become little through the assumption of our littleness, yet without resigning His majesty, in order that he may recall man who had been laid low through sin, to the height of His divine glory."[16] Theology receives its principles immediately from God through the divine revelation given to the prophets and the apostles. When the act of *intelligere* is directed to the human words of Scripture it penetrates beneath them to read them from their inner aspect and so through the senses it reaches what the author intended the words to signify, the *intellectus literalis*, which does impart true knowledge of God. Because it is our nature to learn intelligible truths through sensible objects, God has provided revelation of Himself according to the capacity of our nature and has put forward in the Scriptures truths about Himself through analogical language. Thomas had no real difficulty concerning either the sense or the reference of talk of God. The

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[15]David Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ Press, 1973), 89.

[16]*Compendium Theologiae*, I.

sense of God-talk is analogical; its reference is to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the creator and redeemer of all there is.

Conclusion

Nothing strains the resources available to human language so completely as our attempts to speak of the Triune God. I have noted how both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas identifies these resources through the employment of analogies. In my estimation, analogical language does illuminate the meaning of religious discourse. Although it may not allow us to say anything more or anything less about God than we did before, it does clarify *what* we are saying —and are not saying. This is no small accomplishment. Since the publication of A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic,* the status of religious language and the very conceptual possibility of religious knowledge have become central issues in philosophical theology. The entire task of philosophy in the twentieth century was to clarify what we are saying and what we are not. For much of the philosophical world statements like the credal confession, "but the whole three persons are coeternal together and coequal, so that in all things, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped" are not just irrelevant; they are without meaning, literally nonsensical. They hold no more cognitive significance than "creech creech." The language of analogy, as advanced by Augustine and Thomas, has the potential to give meaning to our language about God. Hopefully, through these and other means, theological language may yet be rescued from the contemporary attempt to discard theology entirely.

Returning to Wittenberg: What Martin Luther Teaches Today's Theologians on the Holy Trinity

David Lumpp

I.

Martin Luther's affirmation of catholic trinitarian theology is well known. Indeed, the same Luther who had little good to say about the papacy or scholastic theology observed, almost matter-of-factly, "this article [of the Trinity] remained pure in the papacy and among the scholastic theologians, and we have no quarrel with them on that score."[1] Many presentations of Luther's theology therefore understandably move on to other more obviously controverted topics. Those who would comment on Luther's trinitarian work are left with two questions. First, if Luther accepted the received trinitarian theology and even acknowledged his agreement with both Rome and Zurich in this area, is there anything distinctive about his use of the Trinity in his mature theology? Second, does Luther continue to inform the thinking of those currently working in this area, and, if so, in what ways?

This second question implicitly acknowledges the explosion of trinitarian theological reflection in the last half century. Arguably most incited by and indebted to Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, contemporary theologians of various persuasions and from many traditions have discovered that perhaps one can say more about the Trinity than the earliest councils had, both in terms of the trinity's historical formulation and its dogmatic status and function.[2]

This essay does not aim to survey or critique that still-growing and often rich body of trinitarian reflection, nor will it summarize Luther's trinitarian theology as such. Rather, the aspiration of this paper is more modest, namely,

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[1]"Treatise on the Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7," in J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, editors, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), 15:310. (Hereafter abbreviated *LW*). Most *LW* citations will also have the parallel citation to Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 58 vols. (Weimar, 1883-), hereafter abbreviated *WA*. See also the more familiar remark in Smalcald Articles, Part I.

[2]For an accessible survey of trinitarian thought in the last half of the twentieth century, see Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). A standard English-language history of the doctrine remains Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972).

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to indicate several areas where contemporary Lutheran theologians writing on the Trinity are returning to themes anticipated, emphasized, or even taken for granted in the trinitarian theology of Martin Luther. To that end, I will identify and develop four aspects of Luther's thinking on the Trinity that have counterparts in the writings of the notable Lutheran theologians working in this area.

II.

The doctrine of the holy Trinity arises not from patristic metaphysical speculation but from the narrative of God's saving, restorative work vis-à-vis humanity in particular and the entire creation in general.

While contemporary trinitarian theologians would not endorse each specific of Luther's biblical exegesis, they nonetheless are sympathetic to his basic trinitarian instinct, namely, that the God confessed as triune at Nicea and Constantinople is the God who raised Israel's Messiah from the dead. Certainly one of the most important and pervasive of Luther's trinitarian themes is his insistence that this dogma is present in both the Old and New Testaments.

The persons of the Godhead are fully revealed (*plene revelatae*), Luther avers, through the Gospel, but they were pointed to immediately at creation (*in initio mundi indicatae*).[3] As one might expect from a pre-modern exegete, Luther finds unmistakable evidence for the Trinity already in Gen. 1. First, there is the grammar of Gen. 1:1: in the beginning *Elohim* (plural) *bara* (singular) the heavens and the earth, where the three persons together create as one.[4] Indeed, Elohim is consistently construed as a trinitarian referent.[5] The reference to the Spirit of God in Gen. 1:2 is likewise trinitarian, as is the cohortative of 1:26, "let us make."[6] (Concerning Gen. 1:26, Luther expressly rejects the utterly ridiculous [*extreme ridiculum*] claim of the Jews that here

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[3]*Lectures on Genesis* [3:22], in *LW* 1:224; *WA* 42:167.

[4]See especially "The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith," where the same rule is also applied to Exod. 23 and Ps. 82. Luther draws the following conclusion: "Therefore our faith is preserved: we believe in no other god than the single eternal God; and yet we learn that the same single Godhead is more than one person" (*LW* 34:223).

[5]See *LW* 1:59; and, regarding Gen. 33:20 and 35:3, *LW* 6:184-185, 232.

[6]See *LW* 1:12; *LW* 3:353; see also, in connection with Gen. 35:6-7, *LW* 6:250.

God is following the custom of princes, or what moderns often call the plural of majesty, or that God is speaking with the angels.[7])

Luther finds the Trinity in general and Christ in particular throughout the Old Testament, but by his own admission especially so in Isaiah and the Psalter.[8] At the same time, David and the prophets learned their trinitarian theology and at least the rudiments of soteriology from Moses (i.e., the Pentateuch).[9] He consistently reads as trinitarian or christological (or both) such familiar accounts as the patriarchal narratives,[10] Ps. 2, Ps. 110, the last words of David in 2 Sam. 23:1-7, and Dan. 7.[11] In pursuit of such trinitarian texts in the Old Testament, Luther occasionally identifies two working guidelines: first, wherever in the Old Testament one finds God speaking about God, as if there were two persons, one may assume that the three persons of the Godhead are in view; second, whenever the Hebrew Scriptures speak of the two persons of the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit is also necessarily present, for the Spirit speaks those words through the prophets.[12]

For those who might find Luther's approach strained, in a candid remark on Gen. 31:42, he admits his strategy: "Therefore I see the Trinity here, and elsewhere too, wherever I can dig out (*possum eruere*) that mystery from passages of the Old Testament."[13] Indeed, while the older and more polemical Luther sometimes asserts the perspicacity of these references, he elsewhere admits that the light of the Gospel illumines with plain language the dark statements (*tenebras veteris Testament*) or enigmas (*aenigmata*) of the Old Testament. The trinitarian mysteries are more definitively unfolded (*certius explicata*) in such New Testament texts as Matt. 28 and 2 Cor. 13.[14] Both testaments are God's testimony (*zeugnis*) of Himself, and the New Testament is based on and proclaimed in the Old.[15] Had the very clear testimonies of the New Testament been expressed in so many words in the Old,[16] the Arians would have emerged long before Jesus birth.[17]

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[7]See *LW* 1:58 and *WA* 42:43; regarding Gen. 11:7-9, see *LW* 7:283; and regarding Gen. 42:7, see *LW* 2:227.

[8]*LW* 15:344.

[9]See, regarding Gen. 20:11-13, *LW* 3:353.

[10]See, for example, commenting on Gen. 18:2 and 19:24, *LW* 1:21; commenting on Gen. 18:2-5, in *LW* 3:194; commenting on Gen. 33:20 and 35:6-7, *LW* 6:184-185, 251.

[11]*LW* 15:275, 278-279, 291, 295.

[12]*LW* 15:280, 282; see also, commenting on Gen. 35:3, *LW* 6:232; and, commenting on Gen. 1:5, *LW* 1:21.

[13]*LW* 6:72; *WA* 44:53.

[14]See, in connection with Gen. 1:26 and 3:22, *LW* 1:59, 223 and *WA* 42:44, 166, 167.

[15]*LW* 34:227; *WA* 50:282.

[16]See, regarding Gen. 1:2, *LW* 1:12; and, regarding Gen. 35:6-7, *LW* 6:250.

[17]So Luther claimed in connection with Gen. 1:26, *LW* 1:59.

However one might be disposed to Luther's conclusions regarding individual passages from the Hebrew Bible, any overt or *de facto* Marcionism is precluded by his consistent claim that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is one and the same God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ for humanity's salvation. "The [Old Testament] letter harmonizes readily (*gerne . . . sich reimet*) with the New Testament," Luther insists, "and it is certain that Jesus Christ is Lord overall. To Him Scripture must bear witness, for it is given solely for His sake."[18] Indeed, Luther asserted that to affirm with John 1:14, the Word was made flesh, is to affirm simply that the promise of God was fulfilled.[19]

III.

Contemporary theologians variously cast and unfold Rahner's rule identifying the economic and immanent Trinity. In ways both traditional and innovative, Luther provided a precursor to this axiom with his discussion of the external and internal operations of the Trinity. His affirmations in both contexts are quite traditional; his applications, as expected, are characteristically evangelical and pastoral.

In relation to us He is one God (*einiger Gott*); within Himself He is distinctive (*unterschiedlich*) in three persons.[20] Luther affirmed the Augustinian insight that the external works (or works to the outside) of the Trinity are indivisible, while the internal works or activities admit and even necessitate distinctions.[21]

The Holy Trinity is one God,[22] wherein the inseparable divine essence or substance refers to the total Trinity and majesty of God, which is shared commonly by all three persons.[23] The Father is the source (*quelle*), fountainhead (*brun*), or wellspring (*ursprung*) who begets the Son; or, in other words, from whom the Son is generated.[24] The Son derives everything from the Father, having been given His deity from eternity by the Father, through

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[18]*LW* 15:343 and *WA* 54:92; see also, regarding Gen. 1:26, *LW* 1:59; and especially in connection with Gen. 20:11-13, *LW* 3:353 and *WA* 43:129: Holy Scripture is in such beautiful agreement (*pulchre consonet*) and the New Testament so clearly proves the same thing [as the Old Testament].

[19]*The Disputation Concerning the Passage: "The Word Was Made Flesh,"* in *LW* 38:266.

[20]*LW* 15:311; *WA* 54:65.

[21]*LW* 15:302, 311; Augustine's assertion appears in *On the Trinity*, Book 2, Chapter 5, Section 9.

[22]*Lectures on Galatians, 1519, LW* 27:290.

[23]*LW* 38:252.

[24]*LW* 15:309, 316, citing 2 Cor. 1:3 and 1 Pet. 1:3; and *WA* 54:64, 69.

the eternal birth.[25] Likewise, the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from both the Father and the Son.[26] Both the immanent birth (*innbleibenden geburt*) of the Son and immanent proceeding (*innbleibende ausgang*) of the Holy Spirit are incomprehensible even to the angels, and they exceed all possible analogy.[27] Along with the parallel affirmation of the one indivisible and eternal Godhead, the internal personal distinctions can only be believed.[28] This is what Holy Scripture teaches, Luther states casually, and to say anything less or anything else is to revert to the errors of ancient heretics, the rabbis, or the Turks.[29]

In working with John's Gospel, Luther quotes John 16:15 (all that the Father has is mine) and 16:14 (regarding the Holy Spirit, He will take what is mine) and declares that here the circle is completely closed, meaning that all three persons are embraced (*zusamen gezogen*) in the single divine essence.[30] This one divine essence planned from eternity to embark on one unified rescue mission, the objects of which are God's estranged and congenitally helpless sons and daughters. Slaves to sin destined for death, God's human creatures are the recipients of His saving mercy. In what may be the most theologically profound of all Luther's writings on the Trinity, the Large Catechism calls the three articles of the Apostles' Creed a description of the entire essence, will, and work of God:

> In [the Creed] are comprehended all our wisdom, which surpasses all human wisdom, understanding, and reason. Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God might be and what he might think and do, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. For in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of His fatherly heart and His pure, unutterable love. For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy, and, moreover, having granted and bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has also given us His Son and His Holy Spirit, through whom he brings

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[25]*LW* 15:309; see also *LW* 34:217, citing Ps. 2:7; as well as Luther's version of St. Ambrose's hymn, "Savior of the Nations Come," *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), #13.

[26]For an explicit discussion of *filioque* on the basis of John 14:26 and 15:26, see *LW* 24:365 and *LW* 34:217.

[27]*LW* 34:217-218; *LW* 38:257; *WA* 50:274; see also especially stanzas 5 and 6 of Luther's hymn, "All Glory Be to God Alone," *Lutheran Worship*, #210.

[28]*LW* 38:257.

[29]*LW* 34:217.

[30]*LW* 24:373 and *WA* 46:67; for summaries of both the unity of the Godhead and its personal distinctions, see *LW* 15:315.

> us to himself. For . . . we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.[31]

To call creation, redemption, and sanctification *opera ad extra* and leave it there does not do justice to Luther's evangelical and pastoral intent. These are not only works to the outside; indeed, simply to identify a divine work as external may not yet speak Gospel. Most importantly, these are works performed for us human beings and for our salvation, as the Nicene Creed confesses. "The announcement of forgiveness [which] encompasses everything that is to be preached about the sacraments and, in short, the entire gospel and all the official responsibilities of the Christian community" —elicits worship.[32] Moreover, lest one forget this message, especially in times of cross and affliction, the Triune God has ways of bringing the promise to remembrance once more: "I am baptized, instructed with the word alone, absolved, and partake of the Lord's Supper. But with the word and through the word the Holy Spirit is present, and the whole Trinity works salvation, as the words of baptism declare."[33] Duly reminded, one calls upon the name of the Lord by whatever person of the triune Godhead one invokes. Neither Luther nor God care which person: "you need have no concern that the [other two persons] are resentful (*zurne*) on that account, but you may know that you immediately call upon all three Persons and the one God, no matter which Person you may address. You cannot call upon one Person without including the others, since there is one indivisible divine essence in all and in each person."[34]

IV.

Contemporary trinitarian thought affirms the relational character of all reality, and the interrelationships and interdependence within the cosmos are held to reflect the dynamics of life in the Godhead. Likewise, Martin Luther understood that the being of the Triune God is known neither speculatively

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[31]LC II, 63-65. For other excellent summaries of the external works, cast in slightly more abstract trinitarian contexts, see especially *LW* 15:302 and 309; and, for a superb doxological unfolding of the economic Trinity in action, see especially stanzas 4-9 of Luther's great hymn, "Dear Christians, One and All," *Lutheran Worship*, #353.

[32]LC II, 54. See also Luther's trinitarian hymn, "We All Believe in One True God," *Lutheran Worship*, #213, especially stanza 3.

[33]Commenting on Gen. 49:11-12, *LW* 8:264.

[34]*LW* 15:316 and *WA* 54:69.

nor abstractly, but only in a relationship of trust, insofar as the God of the Gospel is revealed to sinners in the Son and through the Holy Spirit.

The *opera ad extra/opera ad intra* distinction sketched above is an ideal transition to the main point of this section, namely, that one enjoys life with God by virtue of this God's incarnate self-expression in Jesus Christ, a promise conveyed and sealed by the Holy Spirit, [who] has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith. Indeed, Luther consistently insists that the Father cannot be known except through the Son and the Holy Spirit.[35] He states the matter simply in connection with Gen. 35:2: "Let us therefore apply our hearts and all our efforts to the one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and let us remain in the Mediator Christ. This is the first part of the reformation (*inchoat reformationem*)."[36]

In fact, Luther seldom considers the Trinity without either including or following the discussion with a further elaboration of the person *and* work of Jesus Christ (with person and work often developed in the same paragraph, that is, the work of Christ is described in concert with an affirmation of the communication of attributes).[37] Many of the essential attributes of deity cannot be grasped or understood. Thankfully, however, God manifests Himself through His works and the word:[38]

> It is folly (*insania*) to argue much about God outside and before time, because this is an effort to understand the Godhead without a covering, or the uncovered divine essence (*comprehendere nudam divinitatem, seu nudam essentiam diviniam*). Because this is impossible, God envelops (*involvit*) Himself in His works in certain form, as today He wraps (*involvit*) Himself up in baptism, in absolution, etc. If you should depart from these, you will get into an area where there is no measure, no space, no time, and into the merest nothing, concerning which, according to the Philosopher, there can be no knowledge.[39]

Citations of this sort are brought together in Luther's famous axiom, namely, "outside Christ there is no other God."[40] The truth of this axiom, which in Luther's words was "to be noted well and to be observed most

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[35]SC II, 6; commenting on Gen. 1:26, *LW*:58-59.

[36]*LW* 6:230 and *WA* 44:171.

[37]See, for example, *LW*15: 340-341, 343. Sometimes Luther completes his discussion with a consideration of the Holy Spirit too, but this is not as common. In that connection, see *LW* 15:310.

[38]Regarding Gen. 1:2, *LW* 1:11.

[39]*LW* 1:11 and *WA* 42:10; see also *LW* 1:14, both in connection with Gen. 1:2.

[40]*LW* 38:258.

emphatically (*maxime observandum*),"[41] underscores what was at stake soteriologically in Athanasius' debate with Arius, or, for that matter, in the protracted conflict over the errors of Apollinarius, Nestorius, or Eutyches. Of these patristic controversies, Luther spends more time rebutting subordinationism, and he often seems to prefer Gospel arguments to specific exegetical considerations.[42] Endorsing the precious books of especially Augustine, Hilary, and Cyril of Alexandria,[43] Luther anticipates to some extent the twentieth- and twenty-first-century tendencies to begin with the historical man, Jesus of Nazareth, as depicted in the Gospels: "The Son is revealed in humanity, for the Son alone became man, He alone was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died for us, as our Creed informs us. However, it is also correct to say that God died for us, for the Son is God, and there is no other God but only more persons in the same Godhead."[44]

The Arians foundered on precisely this point. They regarded Jesus as an intermediate being, midway between the divine nature and the created nature of angels.[45] Ironically—or perhaps characteristically—Luther traces Arius' fundamental error to his attempt to comprehend God's majesty without a covering. In doing so, the Arians fell to their destruction.[46] In connection with this dispute, Luther shared the great patristic insight that linked this most central matter of dogma with Christian worship: "When we worship the Man born of Mary, we do not worship a detached person (*abgesorderten Menschen*), a person apart from and outside of God, a separate, independent person. No, we worship the one true God, who is one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and who is one person with His humanity."[47]

In terms of the relationships between God and human creatures, Luther echoed the consensus catholic position: only God can save, or, in his words, if God is not in the scale to give it weight, we, on our side, sink to the ground.[48] Luther elaborates on this trinitarian and christological point:

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[41]*LW* 38:258 and *WA* 39-II:25.

[42]Luther's indictment of the Arians is consistent: "What kind of wisdom is this—to depart from the word and to invent something (*fingere quiddam*) from one's head and later to adorn this with badly distorted (*male detortis*) citations from Scripture to give it a kind of polish? So I, too, could speculate over, and falsify (*depravare*), any passage I might choose." See *Commentary on Psalms 45*, v. 11, in *LW* 12:284 and *WA* 40-II:588.

[43]*LW* 15:310.

[44]*LW* 15:310; see also, especially, *LW* 15:325.

[45]Regarding Ps. 45:11, *LW* 12:283; and regarding Gen. 1:2, in *LW* 1:14.

[46]*LW* 1:14, commenting on Gen. 1:2.

[47]*LW* 15:342 and *WA* 54:91.

[48]*On the Councils and the Church*, *LW* 41:103-104.

> [I]f it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance (*in der wogeschuessel ligt*), His side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale. Yet He can also readily go up again, or leap out of the scale! But He could not sit on the scale unless He had become a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in His own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God.[49]

At the same time, in terms of the revealed relationships among the persons of the Godhead, Luther is equally emphatic, and at the same time soteriological in his application:

> Consequently, when Christ speaks thus of the Father, do not flutter about, do not run away, do not seek God in heaven while you ignore this Man Christ. Outside this Man Christ I must not search for God, and I will find no God. If I do find one, it will not be the true and the right God, but a wrathful one. Thus the Father draws us to the Son by His mouth, His doctrine, and His word. The doctrine passes from the Father through the Son, and at the same time He thereby draws us to the Son. And when you have Him, you are grasping the very Son of God; and then you see and grasp God the Father Himself. *The entire Holy Trinity is known in the Person of Christ.* If we come to the Son, we are at the same time with the Father. He who sees the Person born of the Virgin Mary also sees the Son of God, for the Father places the Son's word and Person before you. This includes all, so that all comes to rest in that Person, lest anyone conceive of God otherwise. Whenever this Person speaks, whenever you hear the Son's word and voice, it is God the Father's voice that speaks and proclaims that the Son was sent into the world for you, suffered and died, etc. With this message He delights your heart and leads you only to Christ. He does not lead you beyond that; nor does the voice of the Father direct you elsewhere when He speaks through the Son.[50]

V.

While the Triune God discloses Himself in the Gospel of both testaments, the dogmatic formulation of the Trinity was the product of a convergence of Spirit-given revelation and varied, sometimes diverse, applications of reason.

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[49]*LW* 41:103-104 and *WA* 50:590.
[50]*Sermon on John 6:46*, *LW* 23:89.

Luther recognized reason's decidedly ambivalent role, and he offered his own contribution to the church's rational reflection on what always remains an article of faith.

None of the foregoing christological emphases diminishes the person or role of the Holy Spirit in Luther's trinitarian reflections. The Christ who discloses the Trinity is in turn proclaimed to contemporary men and women by the Holy Spirit through the light of the word of God.[51] Following the precedent of the New Testament and the Apostles' Creed, Luther ascribes to the Spirit the external working (*eusserliche wirckung*), that is, physically speaking, baptizing, and reigning through the prophets, apostles, and ministers of the church.[52] This work of the Spirit, and not conciliar creativity, is the source of the church's developed doctrine of the Trinity: "the articles of faith must not grow on earth through the councils, as from a new, secret inspiration (*heimlicher eingebung*), but must be issued from heaven through the Holy Spirit and revealed openly; otherwise, . . . they are not articles of faith."[53]

At the same time, the *formulation* of trinitarian theology undeniably exceeds the biblical vocabulary as it seeks to express the personal relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Luther is well aware of the terminological issues involved—in Greek, Latin, and German. He knows the nuances and limitations, the uses and misuses, of *Dreifaltigkeit, Trinitas, hypostasis,* and *persona*—not to mention the notorious *homoousios.*[54] Yet his insistence that one should teach nothing outside of Scripture pertaining to divine matters[55] does not mean that one may never use more or other words than those expressly used in the Bible. Hilary, and Luther, mean only that one should not teach anything "at variance (*nichts anders*)" with the Scriptures. Luther explains:

> [E]specially in a controversy and when heretics want to falsify things with trickery and distort the words of Scripture, [it becomes] necessary to condense the meaning of Scripture, comprised of so many passages, into a short and comprehensive word, and to ask whether they regarded Christ as *homoousious,* which was the meaning of all the words of Scripture which they had distorted with false interpretations among their own people, but had freely confessed before the emperor and the [Nicene] council.[56]

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[51]*LW* 24:374.

[52]*LW* 15:276 and *WA* 54:35.

[53]*LW* 41:58 and *WA* 50:551.

[54]See, for example, *Exposition of John 1 in Sermons of 1537 and 1538,* in *WA* 46:550; *Sermon on Trinity Sunday, 1537,* in *WA* 21:508; *LW* 38:262; *Sermon on John 1:1, LW* 22:16; *LW* 41:83.

[55]Citing Hilary, *On the Trinity,* Book I; in *LW* 41:83.

[56]*LW* 41:83 and *WA* 50:572.

Luther's discussion of these topics provides an excellent case study for his understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. In summary, the matters considered here, which Luther almost incessantly describes with the adjective sublime,[57] seem "uncompromisingly contrary (*herter widder*)" to reason,[58] the normal applications of arithmetic,[59] as well as the typical use of the Aristotelian syllogism.[60] The matters under consideration here are too profound for reason to fathom,[61] and, even if they were within human wisdom's ken, fallen reason is utterly corrupted by original sin.[62] The problem, as Luther sees it, is that those who speculate or err on this topic fail to see Scripture, God's good gift of reason, and logic in their proper relation to one another (*recht zu samen*)—which begins with knowing when the latter two are appropriate and when they are not.[63] Luther argues for a better approach: in the mysterious articles of faith one is to make use of another dialectic and philosophy, namely, the word of God and faith.[64]

In this very context, Luther asserts that the first concern of a theologian is to be a "good textualist (*bonus textualis*),"[65] which in turn begins with listening to and comprehending the word of God in faith.[66] Here again, the work of the Holy Spirit is preeminent, for finally only the Holy Spirit is able to create listeners and pupils.[67] Such listeners and pupils have as their sole concern what God has revealed and commanded in the word, in baptism, and in the Lord's Supper.[68] A good textualist, moreover, will adhere strictly (*nude adhaerendum*) to the word and truth of the Bible and will decline to argue from "philosophical reasons (*rationibus philosophicis*)" in such articles of faith.[69] Luther applies this counsel to a consideration of the Trinity:

> [W]e Christians believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We concede that it is a sublime article of faith beyond the grasp of reason, but we know that nothing is too sublime or impossible

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[57]See, for example, the *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, in *LW* 37:297; *LW* 23:54, regarding John 6:37; *LW* 22:5-6, 76, regarding John 1:1-3 and 1:10; and *LW* 15:277.

[58]*LW* 37:297 and *WA* 26:440.

[59]*The Promotion-Disputation of Georg Major and Johannes Faber*, Thesis 13, in *WA* 39-II:287.

[60]*LW* 38:241.

[61]*LW* 23:54.

[62]*WA* 39-II:253; as a consequence, reason abhors all articles of faith; see *LW* 12:284-285; *LW* 22:76.

[63]*LW* 37:297 and *WA* 26:440; see, for example, *LW* 22:6.

[64]*LW* 38:277, 241.

[65]Regarding Ps. 45:11, *LW* 12:288 and *WA* 40-II:593.

[66]*LW* 22:8.

[67]Regarding John 1:1, *LW* 22:8.

[68]Concerning John 3:11, *LW* 22:314.

[69]*LW* 38:277 and *WA* 39-II:30.

> for faith. For faith relies on God's Word and is guided by it, not by reason. Faith is firmly convinced that the divine truth is unshakable and eternal; for God has said this, and His Word testifies to it. No, this doctrine is not derived from reason; it is derived from the Holy Spirit. And therefore, I suppose, it will always remain incomprehensible to reason without the aid of the Holy Spirit.[70]

The Trinity doubtless is incomprehensible,[71] but that has never stopped theologians of different epochs from speculating about it or seeking to describe it. To that end, they have come up with various analogies to illustrate if not explain the mystery.[72] Predictably, Luther finds them all wanting.[73] They are not so much wrong or even inadequate as they are beside the point. In most cases, they fail to explicate the Gospel, which is the acid test of any Luther-an theological discourse. In place of the typical patristic analogies, Luther offers his own triads, not to substitute for the older sets but to describe better the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Luther's three most striking candidates are Speaker, Spoken Word, and Listener;[74] the Father as the one who wants to comfort, the Son who prays for the comforter, and the Spirit who is the Comforter;[75] and, admittedly in more scattered form, the Promiser, the Promised One, and the one who points to, illumines, and glorifies the one promised.[76] Such depictions, born not of rational reflection but of Gospel-informed exegesis, represent an evangelical trinitarianism of the highest theological order. At their best, today's trinitarian theologians express themselves in these kerygmatic terms.

VI.

The above four points are neither a summary of each point of Luther's trinitarian reflection nor a survey of contemporary thought on the topic.

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[70]*LW* 22:76, regarding John 1:10.

[71]The translation of the Athanasian Creed (paragraph 9) in *Lutheran Worship*, 134, renders the Latin *immensus* with "incomprehensible." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) renders the term "unlimited": "The Father is unlimited; the Son is unlimited; the Holy Spirit is unlimited."

[72]See Luther's discussion, for example, in *LW* 34:219; and *LW* 38:276, where Luther cites Augustine's remark that the [Neo-]platonic philosophers took much from the fathers and from John's Gospel.

[73]*LW* 22:6, concerning John 1:1-3.

[74]Regarding John 16:13, *LW* 24:364-365.

[75]Regarding John 14:16, *LW* 24:111.

[76]See *LW* 4:171, regarding Gen. 22:17-18; *LW* 15:276; *LW* 24:292, 295, 363, and especially 371-372, regarding John 15:26-27 and 16:13, 14; see also stanza 2 of "Come Holy Ghost, God and Lord," in *Lutheran Worship*, #154.

Instead, they seek to identify those areas that might be most fruitful for those interested in working on this topic within the tradition of Martin Luther. As one reads Luther's lectures, sermons, and disputations on these topics, one notices that he frequently almost stops and summarizes the most basic aspects of both the doctrine of the Trinity and catholic Christology. Often these summaries offer the reader nothing new, either in connection with these topics or Luther's thinking on them. Cumulatively, however, their effect is different--and profound. It is as though Luther cannot be reminded enough of these most fundamental truths, on which his very existence before God depended.

Near the end of the research for this essay, I glanced through the American Edition of the Table Talk. There, in an entry from 1540, one gets a glimpse of why Luther repeats these doctrines so often, why he unfolds the incarnation as he does, and why he invariably discusses Trinity and Christology together. The entry also provides an autobiographical glimpse of *the* theologian of the cross against whom all subsequent efforts are necessarily measured.

> However, I have learned, not only through the Scriptures but also from severe inner struggles and trials (*in maximis agonibus et tentationibus*), that Christ is God and has put on flesh, and likewise I have learned the doctrine of the Trinity. Today, therefore, I don't so much *believe* as I *know* through experience that these doctrines are true. In the worst temptations (*in summis tentationibus*) nothing can help us but faith that God's Son has put on flesh, is bone [of our bone], sits at the right hand of the Father, and prays for us. There is no mightier comfort.[77]

[77]*LW* 54, #4915, 371 and *WA*-TR, 577-578.

The Holy Trinity and Our Lutheran Liturgy

Timothy Maschke

I. Introduction

"We *worship* one God in three persons and three persons in one God." So states the *Quicunque Vult* in *Lutheran Worship* and the Book of Concord.[1] As confessional Lutherans, we boldly and confidently declare that we worship the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The topic of the Trinity and worship seems to have such an obvious connection in our common Lutheran faith that we might question whether it is even worth a presentation at a Theologians' Convocation. Regularly, we invoke the Trinity at the start of each service and conclude with a trinitarian benediction. During the service, we confess the Holy Trinity in the creed, and the psalms and collects conclude with trinitarian doxologies. Many of our hymns make reference to the Trinity or conclude with a doxological stanza.[2] Our trinitarian theology saturates our worship ... or does it?

Recently I mentioned this topic to several students at Concordia University Wisconsin and discovered that an increasing number of Lutheran congregations omit the creed on many Sundays. Invocations and benedictions are being replaced with calls to worship and dismissals—using scriptural texts, of course, but avoiding trinitarian terms.[3] A student, not aware of this present project on worship and the Trinity, came up to me recently and said

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[1]*Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982),p. 134; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 24 [hereafter abbreviated Kolb and Wengert]; see also Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 19; *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), 53.

[2]*Lutheran Worship* has eight hymns in its "Trinity" section, five of the "Morning" and "Evening" section are traditional trinitarian hymns, and numerous other texts are trinitarian in the use of doxological stanzas or trinitarian in actual content. Perhaps one of the most ancient trinitarian hymns is #172, "Father Most Holy." Although dated in the tenth century, it has its roots in the early fourth century.

[3]Ruth C. Duck and Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God: The Trinity in Christian Worship* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999), 3, states "And, with many trinitarian theologians in recent decades, we sense that Christian worship in North America is rarely fully trinitarian."

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he had visited an LCMS congregation where they were singing the contemporary song, "Father, I adore you." After the second stanza, "Jesus, I adore you," they stopped. He asked the worship leader why and was told, "We don't worship the Spirit here."[4] Robert Jenson asserts that "the trinitarian heritage includes the triune rhetorical and dramatic structure of Christian liturgy, but this structure is vital in few service books and fewer congregations."[5] What is going on in Lutheranism?

Speaking of terms, I have heard that a few of our congregations have fallen into the politically correct, but theologically fallacious, pattern of speaking of our Triune God in terms of what He does rather than Who He is—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer;[6] or with more gender-inclusive titles, Source, Word, and Spirit; or Parent, Child, and Love.[7] Although these alternatives in liturgical language have some biblical support, they are recognized almost universally as inadequate.[8] This linguistic aspect of trinitarian theology is beyond the

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[4]Jonathan Moyer, personal conversation, February 5, 2003. The evangelical scholar, Robert E. Webber, reported a similar experience at a conference a few years earlier, in "Is Our Worship Adequately Triune?" *Reformation and Revival* 9 (Summer 2000): 121.

[5]Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), x.

[6]"Methodist Maneuvers," *Time*, December 28, 1987.

[7]Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 36-38; earlier, they argue that "when used to the exclusion of other metaphors, the language of Father, Son, and Spirit is too limited and stereotyped to encourage trinitarian faith" (2). Duck and Wilson-Kastner conclude an "invocation," with the following: "Glory be to you, God, Fountain of Love, Word of Truth, Spirit of Power. Amen" (*Praising God*, 139). Kathryn E. Greene-McCreight, "When I Say God, I Mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit: On the Ecumenical Baptismal Formula," *Pro Ecclesia* VI, 3 (Summer 1997): 298-303, evaluates the arguments and several suggested alternative baptismal formulas, including Ruth Duck's "Fountain, Offspring, Wellspring," Gail Ramshaw's "Abba, Servant, Paraclete" and "Of Whom, Through Him, In Whom," and Brian Wren's "Mother, Lover, Friend." See Gail Ramshaw, "Naming the Trinity: Orthodoxy and Inclusivity," *Worship* 60 (November 1986): 491-498, for her proposed alternative. Yet, see S. Anita Stauffer, "In Whose Name?" *Lutheran Forum* 27 (Lent 1993): 6, where she endorses the traditional naming of God as "the only doctrinally acceptable way for a person to be baptized into the Body of Christ." Jenson says that such attempts to replace the biblical trinitarian terminology presupposes "that we first know about a triune God and then look for a form of words to address him, when in fact it is the other way around" (*The Triune Identity*, 17).

[8]Paul Johnson, *The Quest for God: A Personal Pilgrimage* (London: Phoenix, 1996), 47-49, affirms the feminist quest and allows for private variety, but warns against changing liturgical language, which should remain stable for the sake of the people. Frank Senn,

scope of my particular topic, as it is related more closely to the topic of contemporary trinitarian thought, an area assigned to another speaker.

What is behind this shift away from the Trinity? Is it an attempt to meet people's needs by being less doctrinaire, or is it a failure to recognize the importance of confessing our Triune God before an idolatrous world? Is there something happening in our congregations today in the area of worship that is affecting our theology, or are changes in our theology becoming evident in our worship?

II. Theology and Worship

Orthodoxy is one of those wonderful theological terms that is multidimensional. Orthodoxy refers both to correct teaching on the Trinity and to right praise or correct worship of our Triune God. Worship and doctrine go hand in hand, since they are expressions of the faith that has been formed. Robert Jenson articulates this aspect of theology: "It is in the liturgy, when we do not talk about God but to and for him, that we need and use His name, and that is where the trinitarian formulas appear, both initially and to this day."[9] In the first few centuries of Christianity, trinitarian doctrine was formed and influenced by the liturgical life of the Christian community.[10] We have heard of the strong relationship of worship to the Trinity in the church's history. "Worship is the situation in life out of which trinitarian doctrine evolved and is sustained."[11] Only in later years did the correctness of the theological formulations become a central concern.[12]

Recently, an author writing about the relationship of the Trinity and worship pointed to this same close connection between worship and doctrine with a warning: "Since, however, worship shapes the faith of Christians, over time inadequate language of praise will distort a church's understanding and experience of faith."[13] We are formed by what we do and say—our culture

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Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997): 685, makes the dubious comment, "Nevertheless, trinitarian language has been a tough nut to crack."

[9]Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 10.

[10]Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 244.

[11]Christopher Cocksworth, "The Trinity Today: Opportunities and Challenges for Liturgical Study," *Studia Liturgica* 27 (1997): 65.

[12]Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 11, cites several early second century liturgical sources, including Ignatius' *To Magnesians* 13:1; Clement's *To Corinthians* 42:3; 46:6; 58:2; *Second Clement* 20:5; and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:3.

[13]Duck and Wilson-Kastner continue: "The liturgical language of Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox churches tends to be more fully trinitarian than that of Protestant churches just described [evangelical Jesus-only; charismatic Spirit-only; and

has overpowering influence on us. That is why we need to affirm over and over again that our worship forms us into a community of faith and then reflects the true faith of the community to the world.

One of my concerns in this article is to show how our Lutheran liturgical practices flow naturally from and fit neatly into our fully trinitarian theology – there is a mutuality of the *lex orandi-lex credendi* principle.[14] Given the significance of liturgy for both expressing and shaping the theology and spirituality of Christian communities, I want to illustrate how blessed we are to have our confessional theology integrated so well into our liturgical practices.[15]

Most of us are aware of this mutual relationship between liturgy and doctrine. Liturgy communicates doctrine and certainly affects the lives of those who worship. Vilmos Vajta summarized Luther's understanding of worship in these terms, "Rites and ceremonies indeed form a training school of faith. . . . They can serve to bring the immature (the young and simple folk) in the orbit of the Word and Sacrament where faith is born. As long as man is 'external,' such outward orders will be needed for the sake of love, for love and order belong together."[16] Therefore, what occurs in worship affects doctrine; similarly, the doctrine of the church should be evident in its worship, according to Luther.

The Danish Lutheran theologian Regin Prenter carried on Luther's approach to theology and liturgy. In a masterful article, titled simply "Liturgy and Theology," Prenter exhibited this unique Lutheran approach in relating the two to each other: "The liturgy of the Church is theological. It speaks to God and man about God and man. . . . The theology of the Church is liturgical, a part of the liturgy in the wider sense. . . . It serves God and neighbor."[17] The separation of either from the other has detrimental effects warned Prenter:

> If liturgy is separated from theology, i.e., if it is no longer in its essence "theology" or true witness to the revelation of God, it then becomes an

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even liberal "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man"-only]" (*Praising God*, 4).

[14]Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 218-283.

[15]John D. Witvliet, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Theology and Practice of Christian Worship in the Reformed Tradition," Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1997, 9, makes the same general argument.

[16]Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 175.

[17]Regin Prenter, "Liturgy and Theology," *Theologie und Gottesdienst: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Århus: Forlaget Aros, 1977); published in English as *Liturgy, Theology, and Music in the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1959), 151.

> end in itself, a "good work," performed with the intention of pleasing God. . . . If, on the other hand, theology is separated from liturgy, i.e., if it is no longer seen as a part of the liturgy of the Church, part of the living sacrifice of our bodies in the service of God and our fellow men, it, too, becomes an end in itself, a human wisdom competing with and sometimes even rejecting the revelation of God. . . . These two dangers arising out of the neglect of the essential unity of liturgy and theology are, I think, imminent in our present situation in the Lutheran Church.[18]

And that was written almost 50 years ago! Peter Brunner underscored this mutuality of doctrine and worship in his introductory comments to his classic work, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*. He wrote, "The church's doctrine on worship will determine which liturgical order it employs, which it leaves to freedom of choice, and which it rejects."[19] On the other hand, he also states, "But if the dogmatic statements do not simultaneously express what takes place in the concrete worship service in which we take part, this worship will find itself in a bad way. It would then cease to be the worship instituted by God and Christ."[20] To be a Lutheran means that we retain this mutual tension between our orthodox worship life and our orthodox doctrine.

When I speak of the relationship between the Trinity and worship,[21] I am speaking of the relationship between what some theologians have described as the distinction between secondary and primary theology;[22] between cognitive and affective theology; between thinking and doing. That is, the theological expressions of the Trinity in worship are foundational for our

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[18]Regin Prenter, "Liturgy and Theology," in *Liturgy, Theology, and Music in the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1959), 141.

[19]Peter Brunner, "Introduction," *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 24.

[20]Brunner, "Introduction," 27. In an article cited by Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, ix, Brunner wrote: "Liturgy is dogma prayed and confessed" ("Die Ordnung des Gottesdienstes an Sonn- und Feiertagen" in *Der Gottesdienst an Sonn- und Feiertagen: Untersuchungen zur Kirchen agende*, I:1 [Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlag, 1949], 10).

[21]Jim Busher sees a little different relationship. "When we speak of the relationship between the Trinity and worship, we are speaking of the relationship between theology and liturgy. Since theology is the language of Christ and liturgy is the language of the church, their relationship reflects the marital union between Christ and the church. In other words, theology is to liturgy as husband is to wife. This defines theology as the source and life of the liturgy, and liturgy as the expression and glory of theology" ("Worship: The Activity of the Trinity," *Logia* 3 [July 1994]: 3).

[22]Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), distinguishes these two kinds of language from the perspective of time. Before the theological controversies, which began in the fourth century, the language of the liturgy was primary and the doctrinal reflections on the liturgy were secondary.

beliefs as they manifest what is really "inside." In that light, I have taken into consideration two recent disciplines: the *theology of liturgy*, the discipline that describes the nature, purpose, and significance of public worship in terms of (systematic) theology; and *liturgical theology*, the discipline that articulates the theology that corporate worship actually expresses.[23] The German Lutheran theologian, Oswald Bayer, recently noted that a textual variant in the title of the Apocalypse of John adds, "the Theologian," and then comments: "According to the ancient Greek usage, the term 'theologian' does not denote an academic thinker about God. Rather, the term refers to the person who speaks in the context of the liturgy. As the poetic proclaimer of God, the theologian is localized in a particular *Sitz-im-Leben*."[24] True theologians, therefore, are liturgists and proclaimers. It is this synthesis of liturgist and theologian which can serve as a model for us.

Worship provides the arena in which the majority of Lutheran Christians experience and respond to the Trinity without getting into the fine points of philosophical distinctions and theological abstractions. Worship, as we recall from our seminary days, was subsumed under the discipline of practical theology. Whether that is proper is a matter of debate. It is in the area of worship, however, in which our real theologizing takes place and our actual beliefs become evident. A retired professor and former colleague of mine would always say of younger pastors, "You can tell more about a man's theology by what he does than what he says."

A simpler way of saying this is: in worship, we Lutherans see our biblical and confessional theology in action.

A. Lutheran Perspective

I was amazed at the number of books and articles on the subject of Trinity and worship, yet I was frustrated by the near silence on trinitarian worship by Lutheran authors.[25] I kept wondering: Are we so orthodox in both our

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[23]See Aidan Kavanagh and David Fagerberg, *What Is Liturgical Theology? A Study in Methodology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994). Witvleit notes that the former, *theology of liturgy*, is "the most fruitful path for Reformed theology, where liturgical theology is nearly impossible, given the lack of fixed liturgical texts, rubrics, and practices" ("Doctrine of the Trinity," 8-9).

[24]Oswald Bayer, "Poetological Doctrine of the Trinity," trans. Christine Helmer, *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (Spring 2001): 44.

[25]Witvliet, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 1-2, lists in his first footnotes a plethora of recent studies by Orthodox (3 works), Roman Catholic (5 studies), Protestant (7), Reformed (5), Feminist (2), and Liberation (2) theologians. Only one Lutheran has published a book on the subject of the Trinity—Jenson, *The Triune Identity*. Several articles by Lutherans are available, but nothing of any major size.

worship and our theology that we do not need to consider the issue or have we failed to recognize the contemporary significance of this theological dimension in our worship life?

Whatever the answer, I have tried to narrow my remarks to what I perceive as specifically Lutheran understandings and practices of worship and the Trinity. That is, I am coming from the evangelical-catholic perspective that grew out of Luther's Reformation, is reflected in an acknowledged adherence to the Book of Concord, and is expressed in our recent synodical hymnals. This theology and its resultant liturgical practices, I acknowledge, are never isolated from other denominational influences and confessional perspectives.

"Evangelical and catholic" describes Lutheran worship today in many parts of our synod: evangelical in its Gospel orientation toward outreach and catholic in its universal expression of and living witness to the Christian faith for all time.[26] I cherish this Lutheran heritage of worship—especially in light of my assigned topic. We have maintained a strongly trinitarian understanding both because of our great biblical theology and our dynamic liturgical tradition.

Before I go too much further, I want to explain why I am focusing on liturgy rather than Christian worship in general. I understand the concept of worship to be something that is both public and private, while liturgy is a little more narrow and is always corporate. Similarly, when Christians worship they may use ritual, whereas liturgy by its nature is ritual action of theological import. I'm focusing on Lutheran liturgy rather than general Christian worship, because Lutherans historically have been identified as a liturgical church in the evangelical-catholic tradition of Christian public worship.[27] My perspective on Lutheran liturgy also helps me focus our thoughts on what we are doing Sunday after Sunday and how our liturgy reflects our theology and our theology is reflected in our liturgy. Other denominations are facing

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[26]For another perspective on the definition of this phrase, see David P. Scaer, "Evangelical and Catholic—A Slogan in Search of a Definition," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (October 2001): 323-344.

[27]Theodore M. Ludwig makes this association, "Liturgical denominations include the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran churches; nonliturgical groups would be Baptists, Quakers, and the variety of free evangelical churches. Somewhere in between are such groups as the Methodists and the Calvinist (Presbyterian, Reformed) churches, who do not emphasize the traditional liturgies and sacraments but do follow commonly accepted forms of worship" (*The Sacred Paths: Understanding the Religions of the World*, 2nd Edition [Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996], 431).

similar situations, although for some of them it is very nearly a crisis condition regarding the very trinitarian theology they espouse.[28]

B. The Trinity in Theology

It has been suggested by some worship scholars that, perhaps, we are beginning to reap the results of Immanuel Kant's assertion that "the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has *no practical relevance at all.*"[29] I hope that is not the case. For it is precisely in the area of worship that the doctrine of the Trinity has its most practical relevance and also its greatest evidence for the Christian believer in the world. It is in our Lutheran liturgy that our trinitarian theology is most clearly identifiable.

Some theologians have wondered whether our worship and theology has become Unitarian—focusing only on one person of the Trinity, usually the Son. Karl Rahner once wrote, "Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, most Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.'"[30] Even among Lutherans, care must be exercised in our christological emphasis that we do not exhibit an unintentional monotheism or, what others have called a "binitarian deity"—Father and Son, or Son and Spirit—neglecting the interrelationship between all the persons and the unity of activity among the persons.[31]

An avowed feminist, yet trinitarian theologian, Ruth Duck, stated the issue pointedly:

> These days the doctrine of the Trinity is generally peripheral to everyday Christian faith, life, and worship. Many Christians, lay and clergy, consider the Trinity to be an abstract doctrine describing the inner life of God, of interest only to academic theologians. Whether they consider the

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[28]Witvliet, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 20, reflects this. I have also read articles by several Reformed theologians who bemoan the fact that they have no prescribed liturgical texts and so have no basic trinitarian doctrine of worship to fall back upon.

[29]Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 65. American Protestants often echo the derogatory comment made by Thomas Jefferson about the "incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three" (cited in Thomas Cuming Hall, *The Religious Background of American Culture* [Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1930], 172).

[30]Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10. Jenson makes that accusation of "denominational Lutheranism's centuries-long affection for forms of prayer and praise with only second-article remembrance-content and no invocation of the Spirit. . . ." (*The Triune Identity*, 131).

[31]Robert W. Jenson, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (Summer 1993): 300-302, underscores this dilemma of Barth's trinitarian theology that over-emphasizes the relationship of the Father and the Son in Augustinian terms of love and ends up with a "two-sided" modalistic deity. Some have labeled it "binitarian."

> Trinity a late doctrine unsupported by scripture, or they accept the teaching as true but beyond the average person's understanding, such people do not consider the Trinity essential to Christian life or even worthy of thoughtful reflection.[32]

I hope Lutherans have not fallen into that same dilemma.

In this article I wish to underscore the profound beauty of our trinitarian worship as it has been retained in our worship books . . . and to sound a warning about some alternative contemporary resources. I will advert to liturgical practices, but cannot be exhaustive or even inclusive of all that occurs even within our own synod because of the diversity of ideas in popular worship literature.

C. Trinitarian Relationships

Our Trinity is one God in three persons and three persons in one God. As Robert Jenson helpfully points out, "Trinitarian discourse is Christianity's effort to identify the God who has claimed us. The doctrine of the Trinity comprises a proper name, 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,' in several grammatical variants, and an elaborate development and analysis of corresponding identifying descriptions."[33] I do not intend to explicate the doctrine of the Trinity. But, because of the incomprehensibility of that doctrine, various terms have been used to illustrate the relationship of the persons, of which two are particularly pertinent to liturgical worship, *koinonia* and *perichoresis*, as expressions of the comprehensive and integrated view of the Trinity's economy.

True trinitarian worship will reflect the *koinonia* (fellowship) that lies at the heart of God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are related in a fellowship to each other in a way that is beyond our comprehension. This harmonious relationship, however, provides hope for the community of believers who gather in His name. They are bound in that same partnership by the working of this same Triune God through the word and sacraments. The Father's word draws us into a distinctive kinship, the Son's body and blood feeds us as His mystical body, and the Spirit's evoking keeps us in a unique affiliation faith.

True trinitarian worship will also reflect the *perichoresis* (indwelling) that describes the activity of the divine persons in themselves.[34] The Father, Son,

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[32]Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 3.

[33]Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 4.

[34]Don E. Saliers speaks of this in a more literal sense of "dancing around": "This dance around (*perichoresis*) of honor and blessing in the very heart of God will not rest content until it is also shared in brokenness and in the actualities of life" (*Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1994], 41). The feminist

and Holy Spirit move together in a partnership that is beyond our comprehension. This interpenetration of persons, however, provides comfort for the community of believers who gather in His name. They are engaged in that same mutuality by the working of this same Triune God through the word and sacraments. Richard Eyer's latest book captures this dimension, when he says, "This is the function of the Divine Service in the Christian life: to be taken out of ourselves and into the life of God."[35]

The miracle and marvel of the Trinity is that we believe in an utterly transcendent deity who created the universe and sustains it daily, yet who has chosen to come to us human beings in human form and in human language so that we can embrace Him in a community of love and obedience.[36] He is our Father because of our Brother who establishes fellowship with us by His Spirit.

> We cannot call upon the name of the Father except the Spirit enables us (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15), because God who is the Father of light and thus beyond creation (Jam. 1:17) dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). At the same time, Christ who is the icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) reveals the Father to us. In Christ we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Thus the whole Trinity is involved in God's relationship with us and our relationship with God.[37]

III. The Thesis

Lutherans experience the Holy Trinity in three distinct, yet interrelated, spheres of our liturgy – praising the Father who forgives us, remembering the Son who serves us, and invoking the Spirit who sanctifies us; to worship without all of these is to do a disservice both to God and to the worshipers. I will use three interlocking circles, the typical Trinity symbol, as a way of understanding the interrelatedness of the Trinity in our liturgical activities.

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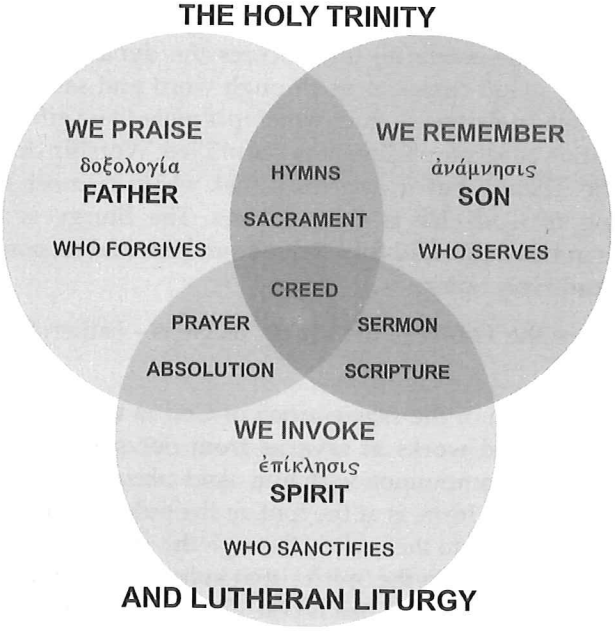
theologian, Catherine Mowry LaCugna (*God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* [San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993], 272), expands on this concept by encouraging liturgical dance as an expression of the Trinity.

[35]Richard C. Eyer, *They Will See His Face: Worship and Healing* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 34.

[36]In one sense, this illustrates a point made by Robert Jenson when he points out that when Lutherans (or any theologians for that matter) *use* the doctrine of the Trinity, they are "led – indeed, compelled – to treat the three as *parties* of divine action, and that also 'imminently'" ("You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," 299).

[37]Jay Cooper Rochelle, "The Mystery of the Trinity and Christian Prayer," *Lutheran Forum* [Una Sancta edition] 35 (Fall 2001): 15.



This diagram depicts the relationship I see in our Lutheran liturgy and our doctrine of the Trinity. I am indebted for the initial ideas contained in this diagram to Robert Webber, who in several articles called for a return among evangelicals to the trinitarian nature of worship by praising the Father, remembering the Son, and invoking the Spirit.[38] I have tried to have this diagram reflect the truths underscored so beautifully by Norman Nagel in the "Introduction" to *Lutheran Worship* and by Roger Pittelko in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, that worship, as Lutherans understand it, starts and ends with God's activity. We merely respond to Him in gratitude and praise.[39]

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[38]Robert Webber, "In the Name of the Father," *Worship Leader* (September-October 1996); Webber, "In the Name of the Son," *Worship Leader* (November-December 1996); and Webber, "In the Name of the Spirit," *Worship Leader* (January-February 1997). Available at http://www.instituteforworshipstudies.org/Resources/Articles; accessed 11/20/2002.

[39]Norman Nagel, "Introduction," *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), 6. Roger D. Pittelko, "Corporate Worship of the Church," in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993): 45. One of my regrets with this diagram is that it is not animated. There are elements that are placed in one static location on this diagram which should really be floating between spheres. I hope this will become clear in my explanation. I am aware of the inadequacies of any model or illustration, knowing that Jesus also is our great Intercessor (Heb. 6:20; 7:25-28; 8:1-6) and that the Spirit is active in the Sacrament of the Altar, too (John 14:26).

Worship as *Gottesdienst* (one of those favorite German Lutheran words because of its double-entendre) underscores the dynamic relationship of Lutheran liturgy—God comes to us through word and sacrament and we respond in prayers and praise—thus, worship is more like a gift to be received than an obligation or accomplishment to be fulfilled. Worship does not define or explain the Trinity, but it expresses that which is most basic in our understanding of God—He is three in one. The liturgy is the regular circumstance in which the faithful receive from Him and respond to Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We experience the Trinity in the liturgy as He is—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

> And this pattern of the *saving action* of God is what the Trinity is all about—how God works to save us from our sin and bring us into fellowship and communion with him. And *where* God does this, in the same pattern and form, is at the font, at the pulpit, and at the altar. . . . And that rhythm—to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit—by the Father from the Son in the Spirit—that spiritual rhythm of prayer and font and pulpit and altar—*that is God!* God is not something "above" or "behind" that rhythm of Father, Son and Spirit—God *is* that Rhythm in our spiritual and prayerful and sacramental life in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whatever we do or say or believe or act upon as Christians in the name of God, we do so *to* the glory of the Father, *through* the glory of the Son, *in* the glory of the Spirit, so that all we do as disciples of our Lord Jesus we do to the glory of the one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[40]

This is doxological worship.

True, genuine trinitarian worship will always be christocentric. God comes to us most clearly in the incarnation, and the liturgy will be incarnational as God comes to touch us with His presence. The Father is honored, as is any father when his child is recognized for what he has done and for who he is, when we look at His gift of love, Jesus, the Christ. The Spirit is honored, in His self-deprecating focus on Christ, whom we see was conceived in the virgin and who was inscripturated as the Word. Yet, this Spirit also connects with our spirits and enables us to worship fully! Such worship not only involves the three persons of the Trinity, but it requires the participation of the worshipers as they are incorporated into the body of Christ. John Kleinig reiterated this thought when he spoke of worship in the name of Jesus: "He

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[41]Mark E. Chapman, "The 'Three-In-One-God' At Font, Pulpit and Altar," *Bride of Christ* 19 (Pentecost 1995): 25.

comes to us and does things for us when we gather together in His name. He brings the Holy Spirit with Him and ushers us into the presence of His Heavenly Father. In worship, then, we come into contact with the Holy Trinity. We come into the presence of the Triune God and share in the ministry of Jesus."[41]

Robert Jenson has noted that ". . . Barth is the theologian . . . by which Western theology rediscovered that the doctrine of Trinity, while indeed a mystery, is not a puzzle, that instead it is the frame within which theology's mysteries can be shown and its puzzles solved."[42] Brian Wren, the British hymn writer, in a collection of his hymns entitled, *Praising a Mystery*, captures the powerful image of this divine mystery when speaking of the Trinity:

> God is not one-dimensional, but a multi-dimensional mystery, decisively known in Jesus, active now as the Holy Spirit. The living God is a mystery, not a secret: secrets puzzle us, but lose their fascination when they are revealed. A mystery deepens the more it is pondered and known. At their best, worship, thinking and action are attempts to praise that mystery, to know God, and be known.[43]

Jay Cooper Rochelle elaborated on the need for mystery, yet the need for knowing God, particularly His name. "Genuine negative theology says, God is indeed *absconditus* (hidden) and dwells in unapproachable and ultimate mystery that cannot be mouthed fully, but (praise be to God) we have been given revelation enough to save us and word enough to allow us to speak to God by name."[44]

IV. The Holy Trinity and Our Lutheran Liturgy

God's people are gathered by the Spirit to respond to the Father in Jesus' name.

Luther, more than any other Reformation theologian, recognized the importance of participation in the Trinity through the liturgy. The very structure of the mass invited and involved the people as members of the priesthood of all believers. In addition, it provided them with the opportunity

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[42]John W. Kleinig, "The Biblical View of Worship," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58 (October 1994): 247.

[43]Jenson, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," 297.

[44]Brian Wren, *Praising a Mystery* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing, 1986), second [unnumbered] page of the introduction.

[45]Rochelle, "Trinity and Christian Prayer," 14.

to be in the presence of God Himself. The Father was providing, the Son was speaking, and the Spirit was working on the hearts and minds of all.[45]

When we consider a liturgical Sunday service, we find three major elements. First, our Triune God gathers His guests who humbly and unworthily acknowledge the mystery of His presence and forgiveness and respond in with confession and praise. Secondly, our Triune God speaks to us of His saving work and eternal hope as we respond with prayer and thanksgiving. Thirdly, our Triune God nourishes us with His very presence for continuing ministry in the world as we receive and share His life of love with each other and the world.

The invocation is more than an announcement of God's presence or a way of getting His attention.[46] Because of our baptismal faith, God's people gather together in His name, bearing witness to this faith, seeking the opportunity to be strengthened and nurtured as well as to respond. Luther D. Reed explains the invocation this way:

> This formula sums up all that we know of the divine Being in a brief scriptural phrase which has long been used in devotional and liturgical acts of many kinds throughout the universal church. . . . As used here at the beginning of the Service, however, it has the value of an "invocative blessing," as the name indicates, it is addressed to God and not to the congregation. It is an affirmation of faith, prayer of

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[46]Martin Luther says, "For participation in the Supper is part of the confession by which they confess before God, angels, and men that they are Christians" ("An Order of Mass and Communion," in J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, editors, *Luther's Works,* American Edition, 55 vols. [St. Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986], 53:34, hereafter abbreviated as *LW*). Jeremy Driscoll stated this trinitarian dynamic from his Catholic perspective in this way: "The trinitarian doctrine of the church, achieved by theological reflection and expressing the central content of her faith, is rooted in the plunge into trinitarian life effected by the eucharist and the other sacraments. . . . Thus, it is the *form* of the rite that manifests this divine *form*. In one of the dimensions of this form, it can be said that in the eucharist the *Father* gives himself through the *Son* to the world in the *church,* and the *Spirit* illumines and vivifies every dimension of this gift. In another dimension, the *church* responds in thanksgiving by offering to the *Father* the very gift she has received: the *Son*. The *Spirit* effects the transformation of the *church's* gifts into the body and blood of the *Son*. Here we see that this manifestation of the Trinitarian mystery is at one and the same time participation in it. *Many* are *one,* through sharing in the death and resurrection of the Lord, in the *oneness* of Father, Son, and Spirit" ("Theology at the Eucharistic Table: Master Themes in the Theological Tradition," *Pro Ecclesia* 11 [Fall 2002]: 395).

[47]Kleinig explains the common order of service and says, "It begins with the invocation which announces the presence of the Triune God" ("Biblical View," 249). As noted in this paper, the invocation is much more than an announcement.

> profession—an approach similar to . . . the words "Our Father" at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer. We formally express our "awareness" of the presence of God, we place ourselves in that presence, and invoke the divine blessing upon the service which is to follow. We confess our faith in the Holy Trinity, for whose worship we are assembled. We solemnly call God to witness that we are "gathered together" in His name (Matt. 18:20) and in that name offer all our prayer, praise, and thanksgiving (John 16:23).[47]

Or, as Norman Nagel eloquently and poetically echoed these ideas:

> The Lord's triune name comes first in Holy Baptism. If He had not given us His name we would still be making up our own gods. His is the initiative; the action is from Him to us. "In the name" means—along with much more—at His bidding, by His authority, His mandate. . . . This is the name that was put on us with the water at our Baptism. Gathered in the name of God are those who rejoice in their Baptism. . . .[48]

The service begins with and is initiated by the Holy Trinity.

A. The Forgiving Father is Praised

1. The forgiving Father restores us in the Absolution

In the first sphere of the liturgy, the focus is on the Father. Confession is an acknowledgment not only of our humanity, but of our recognition that our Creator is also our Judge, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. We join with the prodigals of all time in confessing, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Luke 15:18b). While we acknowledge the Father as the Absolver, the second form of confession in *Lutheran Worship* is most explicitly trinitarian:

> O most merciful God [referring to the Father], since you have given your only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy on us and for His sake grant us forgiveness of all our sins; and by your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of you and of your will and true obedience to your Word, to the end that by your grace we may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Father's gift of His Son and the Spirit's sanctifying work are properly distinguished in this confession. Similarly, the declaration of grace is particularly trinitarian:

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[48]Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 252.

[49]Norman E. Nagel, "Holy Baptism," in Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 262.

> Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy on us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To those who believe on His name he gives power to become the children of God and has promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. Grant this, Lord, to us all.[49]

Thus, the preparatory portion of our worship is clearly and carefully trinitarian as this trinitarian confession seems to be intentionally reminiscent of the post-baptismal blessing: "Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with His grace to life everlasting."[50]

2. The forgiving Father pardons us in the Supper

This forgiving Father comes to us again. The assurance of forgiveness is made more concrete later in the service as we receive God's gift of His Son, whose body and blood are given and shed for us. Certainly our attention is drawn again to the Father as Forgiver, but in the eucharistic prayer we are also reminded of the Father's initiating grace which engages the whole Trinity:

> Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have had mercy on us children of men and given your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We give you thanks for the redemption you have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that he may establish in us a living faith and prepare us joyfully to remember our Redeemer and receive him who comes to us in His body and blood.[51]

Notice the carefully crafted prayer's trinitarian consciousness, each person of the Trinity is involved in the benefits of the Supper – the Son is remembered and the Spirit is invoked – yet it is the forgiving Father whom we address.

3. We praise the Father in song and hymns

As a result of the Father's gifts to us, we respond with our songs of praise and thanksgiving. From the opening hymn to the closing song, our Lutheran hymnody reflects strong acclamations of praise, yet they are also filled with trinitarian images. After a hymn, usually called the Entrance Hymn, we sing the *Kyrie*. The triple-reference in the *Kyrie*, "Lord..., Christ..., Lord, have mercy," indicates that this prayer of mercy is directed to each person of the Trinity. Immediately following the *Kyrie*, the community of faith joins with the

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[50]*Lutheran Worship*, 137.
[51]*Lutheran Worship*, 203.
[52]*Lutheran Worship*, 171.

Christmas angels in praising the Father. The *Gloria in Excelsis*, however, expands the angel's message with a trinitarian focus on the Father's gift, the Son's sacrifice, and the Spirit's presence.[52]

Later in the Communion liturgy, the *Sanctus* provides a profound hymn of adoration to our triune God. Luther's hymnic setting of the *Sanctus*, for example, reflects this dynamic trinitarian dimension of our Lutheran worship service, as he depicted the great throne room of heaven and the seraphim singing their triple-holy (LW 209). Positioned as it is in the midst of the Service of Holy Communion, we join with "angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" to sing God's praises. This triple-holy (*Trisagion*) echoes the songs of the seraphim in Isaiah 6, as the congregation joins the choirs of angels in Revelation. We see that our worship is both trinitarian and trans-temporal. Similarly, we join the choruses of Jerusalem as the *Sanctus* leads us into the Benedictus, with its haunting plea in the triple "Hosanna!"

Many of our communion hymns express appreciation to the Father for the Son's presence and the Spirit's activities. The traditional post-communion canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis*, introduced by the Lutheran reformers from Vespers via Compline, is exemplary of this emphasis on the Father's gift.[53] The congregation joins Simeon of old in responding to the real presence of the Son in the sacrament, by acknowledging the Father, "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled."[54]

4. We pray for blessings from the Father with grateful hearts

The community gathers not only to receive, but also to petition the Father of lights for His continuing help. While the Father is normally addressed in Christian prayers, the other persons of the Trinity are certainly recognized.

In response to the Father's invitation and direction, the worshiping community offers its prayers to Him. In the early church, prayers were addressed *to* the Father *through* the Son *in* the Spirit.[55] This practice is being restored in recent years, since it noticeably reflects Paul's words in Eph. 2:18 "For through [Christ], we . . . have access in one Spirit to the Father." Our collects, however, typically conclude, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever," in

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[53]*Lutheran Worship*, 160-161; as well as Luther's hymn, "All Glory Be to God Alone" (# 210) or Nikolaus Decius' hymn, "All Glory Be to God on High" (# 215).

[54]Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 379.

[55]*Lutheran Worship*, 173-174.

[56]Evidence abounds for this formulation as the following ancient sources illustrate: *The Apostolic Tradition, The Anaphora of Basil, The Sacramentary of Serapion, The Apostolic Constitutions*, and *The Canons of Hippolytus*.

order to show the equality of persons. This is not mere piety, but a strong confession of the activity of the Trinity in our lives together, which grew out of the early trinitarian controversies. While the Arian viewpoint was strongly and debilitatingly opposed by this change, Andrew Horseman suggests that "the Church found it had lost the 'shape' of the Trinity."[56]

Yet, a trinitarian equality in prayer forms is also evident from earliest times in Christian corporate prayer. Perhaps typical of these properly trinitarian prayers is the prayer of Polycarp upon his martyrdom, which was addressed to "Lord God, almighty Father of your beloved and blessed Servant Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of you, 'the God of angels and powers and all creation' and of the whole race of the righteous who love in your presence." It concluded with this trinitarian doxology: "For this and for everything I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Servant, through whom be glory to you with him and Holy Spirit both now and to the ages to come. Amen."[57] Similarly a prayer at an ordination, recorded in the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, exhibits the following trinitarian doxological termination: "Through your Servant Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom be glory, might and honour to you, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, both now and always and world without end. Amen."[58] Prayers addressed to the Father have always been trinitarian.

In prayer we use the name of God properly. As noted before, Robert Jenson shows that God's name is indeed "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." By praying to the Triune God, we are following Luther's catechetical directives regarding the second commandment: "the proper way to honor God's name is to look to it for all consolations and therefore to call upon it. Thus, we have heard above, first the heart honors God by faith and then the lips by confession."[59]

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[57]Andrew Horsman, "The Shape of the Trinity: Eucharistic Worship and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Theology* 102 (March-April 1999): 92. Actually, the phrase suggested by Basil was "glory to the Father with (*meta*) the Son with (*syn*) the Holy Spirit" (*On the Spirit* 7:3, 16, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, V). Later in the same document, Basil would write, "For myself, I pray that with this confession I may depart hence to the Lord, and them [my accusers] I charge to preserve the faith secure until the day of Christ, and to keep the Spirit undivided from the Father and the Son, preserving, both in the confession of faith and in the doxology, the doctrine taught them at their baptism" (10:26).

[58]*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:1, 3, in *Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics vol. 1, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970), 154.

[59]*Apostolic Tradition* 1:3, ed. Burton Scott Easton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).

[60]*Large Catechism* I, 70 (Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 395).

One area, however, where our Lutheran liturgical prayer formula is weak in its trinitarian emphasis is in the general prayer in *Lutheran Worship*. While the diaconal form of the prayers are addressed to the Father as "Lord," the conclusion eliminates any reference to the Spirit, as the presiding minister says: "Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord."[60] With the strong trinitarian emphasis throughout the rest of the service, this omission of a direct reference to the Holy Spirit is probably not hazardous.

B. The Serving Son is Remembered

The second sphere of our Lutheran liturgy centers on the Son. God's Son serves as our Liturgist (*leitourgos* in Heb. 8:2). He provides for us and makes our worship not our work at all, but a gift of God. John Kleinig has written:

> The chief celebrant is Jesus, our great high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. He leads us in our worship by representing us before the Father in intercession and thanksgiving (Hebrews 7:25; 9:25) and by representing God the Father to us in proclamation and praise (Hebrews 2:12). By means of His service in the heavenly sanctuary Jesus leads us, together with the angels and the whole communion of saints, in the performance of the heavenly liturgy (Hebrews 2:11; 8:2; 12:22-24; 13:15).[61]

1. The serving Son nourishes us with the Bread of Life in Scripture.

Early in His ministry, Jesus quoted Moses, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4 citing Deut. 8:3). Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14), the *Pantocrator* who was the Word at creation (John 1:1), and continues to sustain His creation with that word and speaks to us today through the words of men. Every liturgical Lutheran worship service includes readings from Scripture.[62] "I am the Bread of Life," Jesus said (John 6:35, 48). These words feed and nourish God's people. Old Testament passages point to the promises of God. New Testament verses recall the benefits of Christ's coming. The Gospel always features some work or word of Christ that affects the daily lives of the assembled believers as reminders of God's nurture and care.

In addition to the prescribed readings themselves, Christians have utilized the great hymnal of the church, the Psalter. In so doing, they have supplemented each psalm with a trinitarian doxology. This is not some kind

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[61]*Lutheran Worship*, 168.
[62]Kleinig, "Biblical View," 246.
[63]Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship, 1523," *LW* 53:11.

of a negative statement, suggesting that the Old Testament is a Jewish book or is somehow inadequate; rather, it is a positive example of being clear in affirming our trinitarian theology. Luther D. Reed explained:

> The Gloria Patri or Little Doxology (as distinguished from the Gloria in Excelsis) has doctrinal as well as devotional values. It distinguished the Christian use of the Psalter and connects the Old Testament texts with . . . the New Testament. Thus it is regularly added to every psalm, canticle, or portion thereof. Its use in the early church affirmed the orthodox belief in the divinity, equality, and eternity of the three Persons, in opposition to Arian and other heresies. Yet the continued use of the Gloria Patri in the liturgy today is more than a memorial of ancient controversies. It is a brief but clear profession of faith in the Holy Trinity and particularly in the divinity of our Lord.[63]

Thus, the Psalter is a Christian worship resource, and the doxologies point to that trinitarian reality.

2. The serving Son feeds us with Himself in the bread and wine.

Later in the service our Savior comes again. Here again, we see how our Lutheran trinitarian and sacramental theology comes out tangibly during the liturgy of Holy Communion. Here we again affirm the fact that we receive the very body and blood of Him who offered Himself and said, "This is my body . . . this is my blood." We take Jesus for His word and He feeds us with Himself. But more than that, our trinitarian theology is present. The Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, is given by the Father. The eucharistic prayer underscores this trinitarian emphasis as we praise the Father, remember the Son, and invoke the Spirit.[64]

3. We remember our Savior's service as we reflect on Scripture and the sermon.

Our response to Christ's activity is to remember Him, as He requested (Luke 22:19). Remembering Christ includes His incarnation as the Logos of God, the creator of heaven and earth, His suffering both actively and passively, His death and resurrection, and His promise to come again (a strong eschatological dimension in our worship).

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[64]Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 264.

[65]See *Through the Church the Song Goes On*, ed. Paul J. Grime, et. al. (St. Louis: Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1999), 43-72, for a discussion on the use of a more elaborate and traditional Eucharist Prayer. The traditional eucharistic prayer of early Christian liturgies with its anamnesis and epiclesis were fervently and faithfully trinitarian in nature.

This remembering is not merely a recalling of dates or events or facts, but is a participating in the past event with present and future blessings—"contemporaneity" is the word I have used to describe it.[65] When God's word is read and proclaimed and sacramentally distributed, He makes Himself present among us and we enter into that story as the text is applied to our lives. James B. Torrance describes this effect: "True theology is done in the presence of God in the midst of the worshiping community. The 'two horizons' of the Bible and our contemporary church life fuse in worship. . . ."[66]

Particularly in the sermon, the message of Christ is central (Rom. 10:17). Carefully distinguishing and applying the Law and Gospel propels the word into the hearts of the hearers.[67] With St. Paul, Lutheran pastors repeat, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23). The message of Christ can only be preached by the power of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul reminds us, ". . . No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3b). Philip Pfatteicher has expressed it this way:

> In the power of the Holy and life-giving Spirit, the work of God in Christ is remembered. The story of the salvation of the world is renewed. The paschal mystery at the heart of the Christian faith is recalled and brought into the present as a living reality as the Church remembers before the Father the deeds of the Son, who in fulfillment of His promises, makes himself present to the congregation.[68]

Thus, even without making a direct reference, our remembering the Son is a trinitarian activity.

4. We remember Christ through our songs of praise and sacrament.

We also respond to Christ with our voices. The angels' song, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, mentioned earlier with its expansion from Luke, is an affirmation of praise to the Father Almighty, but also to the only-begotten Son, the Lamb of God, the Son of the Father, who only is Lord; who "with the Holy Spirit are most high in the glory of God the Father."[69] Our celebrative and joyful remembrance of the Son is trinitarian.

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[66]Timothy Maschke, "Contemporaneity: A Hermeneutical Perspective in Martin Luther's Work," *Ad Fontes Lutheri: Toward the Recovery of the Real Luther* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 165-182.

[67]James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 10.

[68]Martin Luther, in commenting on 1 Pet. 4:1, said: "Christ is present and preaches to the hearts wherever a preacher proclaims the word of God to the ear" ("Sermons on the First Epistle of Peter," *LW* 30:138).

[69]Philip Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1997), 99-100.

[70]*Lutheran Worship*, 139.

I found it interesting that several years ago, the United Church of Christ prepared a "mostly gender-neutral" *Gloria*, yet was criticized for keeping the term "Lord," when referring to Christ. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth," it begins. As it concludes, it states, "For you alone are the Messiah, you alone are the Lord, you are alone the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of the triune God."[70] That last line, in substituting the word "triune" for the name "Father," in effect eliminated the Trinity from this hymn of praise, by distinguishing the Triune God from Jesus and the Spirit.

The second hymn of praise in *Lutheran Worship*, "Worthy Is Christ (This is the Feast)," recalls Christ's victory for us and for our salvation, yet it goes beyond. This paeau of praise, a "new" song adapted from the songs of Revelation, is lifted to the Holy Trinity. The hymn centers the worshipers' attention on Christ, the Lamb, whose victory has been won and whom all heaven joins in praising with the Father. Specific references to the Spirit are absent, although the triple Alleluias give subtle witness to the trinitarian frame of reference.

Our remembering is most sustained in the distribution of the Lord's body and blood. Again the contemporaneity of our worship is evident—Christ is truly present with us as we experience His Supper by the Spirit's activity and the Father's gracious giving. This contemporaneity contrasts the Reformed concept of the real presence being only something faith grasps or the Roman Catholic concept of re-presenting Christ's sacrifice. Christ is really present with His gathered guests.[71]

C. The Sanctifying Spirit is Invoked

Our third circle encloses the activities of the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier.

1. The sanctifying Spirit assures us of our forgiveness.

As our Lutheran confessors stated, "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel."[72] This activity of applying the words of God to our personal lives is the chief activity of the Holy Spirit. He takes what are the Father's and the Son's and makes them ours (John 16:15).

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[71]Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 51.

[72]Perhaps most illustrative of this concept is Lucas Cranach's altarpiece in St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, where Martin Luther is seated with the twelve apostles at the Last Supper.

[73]Augsburg Confession V, 1-2 (German text, Kolb andWengert, *Book of Concord*), 40.

Particularly for us pastors, who preach and speak the words of Absolution, we need to know that those words are indeed God's word spoken in Christ's place by us as called ministers of Christ.

2. The sanctifying Spirit communicates with our spirits through the sermon and Scripture.

Frank Senn, citing Roland Allen, an evangelical theologian, spoke of the work of the Spirit as working "through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the administration of the sacraments of Christ to bring the disobedient, hostile, and recalcitrant world into a new and redeemed community, the church, the body of Christ on earth."[73] What a comfort it can be for us to know that the Spirit uses our words and His word to reach out into the world.

The readings from Holy Scripture are the promised means that the Triune God uses most concretely to communicate with humanity. It is His word, not the words of mere human writers. This we acknowledge when we hear the lector say, "This is the word of the Lord." To which we respond, "Thanks be to God." God is speaking and we express our gratitude to God for blessing our hearing.

When the Holy Gospel is read, the trinitarian references become more full. We anticipate the Holy Gospel by singing the Hebrew "Hallel" or the Greek "Alleluia," praising God for His divine and Spirit-ed presence and His good news in Christ. "Glory to you, O Lord" is our response to the announcement of the Holy Gospel, and it echoes the imagery of the Old Testament *Shekinah Yahweh*. After the reading of the Gospel, our "Praise to you, O Christ" reaffirms our recognition that Jesus is LORD, something only possible by the activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). As Norman Nagel wrote, "Where Jesus' words are going on, there is also the Spirit (John 6:63). Any spirit apart from Jesus is not the Holy Spirit (John 16:15). The Holy Spirit is most pleased when we speak of Jesus and not of him. He gives only Jesus gifts."[74]

In the sermon, the Spirit draws us into the dialectic messages of Law and Gospel, which are proclaimed in the life, death, and resurrection of the Father's only-begotten Son. By the power of His Spirit, that word, which He caused to be written, is now explored, explained, and expounded for the life of God's people in the sermon. The activity of the Trinity is never more potent than during the sermon.

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[74]Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 39, citing Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit*, ed. David M. Paton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

[75]Norman E. Nagel, "Holy Communion," in Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 290.

In the early church, the activity of the Spirit was underscored particularly well in the *Didascalia*, an early Christian book on worship and instruction from the third century: "prayer is . . . said through the Holy Spirit, and the eucharist is accepted and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and the scriptures are the words of the Holy Spirit."[75] The Spirit was active in all three spheres of worship.

3. We invoke the Spirit's presence as we listen to the word proclaimed.

Invoking the Spirit is more than merely a third link in our liturgical activity; it is a vital and personal relationship in trinitarian worship. The place of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation and the economy of the Trinity has always been that of the stage crew in a dramatic production—present, but invisible to the audience. Jesus tells us that the Spirit directs our attention to Jesus, not to Himself (John 16:15). Whenever we address the Father or the Son, the Spirit is active in His proper work.

Liturgically, the Hymn of the Day reflects the Spirit's activity in and through the word, as does the traditional offertory, "Create in me a clean heart" (Ps. 51), which requests the continuing activity of the Spirit in response to the word for a living faith. The texts for the Hymns of the Day, specifically selected to complement the readings, routinely conclude with a doxological stanza or are written around some particular revelation of the Trinity, emphasizing the activity of the Spirit through the word of the Father in Christ.[76]

4. We are moved by the Spirit to pray for the community.

In all of this, we reflect Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, that "The Holy Spirit . . . calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." This gathering by the Spirit also involves the gathering of our sighings, which He transforms into effective, prayerful speech understood by the Father (Rom. 8:26-27). The intercessory activity of the congregation is in reality the intercessory activity of the Spirit. These corporate prayers echo Jesus' final and profoundly trinitarian words on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 24:46). Our spirits are united with Christ's Spirit as we speak to the Father in prayer. Thus, the Spirit moves us to pray, and the Spirit offers our prayers to the Father through the Son.

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[76]*The Didascalia* 1:32 in *The Liturgical Portions of the Didascalia*, ed. Sebastian Brock and Michael Vasey (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1982).

[77]*Lutheran Worship*, 976-978, provides a listing of the "Hymn of the Day" for each Sunday in the church year.

Arthur Just has helpfully drawn our attention to the Lukan account of Jesus' Easter appearance as centered in a worship setting.[77] As the word was expounded their "hearts burned within them" (24:32) and as Jesus broke the break their "eyes were opened" (24:31). That experience should occur for our people, too, as the Spirit communicates through the words of Christ at the Table of the Lord. This dimension of our worship is evident in the post-communion prayers as we pray to the Father, giving thanks for His Son, and do so in the powerful name of the Trinity.

The invocation of the Spirit is finally evident in the eucharistic prayer in *Lutheran Worship*. In this prayer we see our Lutheran theology coming out distinctly. The Father's love is recalled and the Son's gift of Himself is remembered and then the Spirit is invoked. Not in the Eastern Orthodox or Catholic Eucharistic prayer form, but the epiclesis of the Spirit follows Luther's explanation of preparation for the Lord's Supper. Luther reminds us that "Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but *a person who has faith* in these words, 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,' *is really worthy and well prepared* [emphasis added]."[78] The Spirit is invoked to strengthen the faith of the recipients so that they are truly worthy and well prepared.

D. The Creed is at the Center

The Invocation and Benediction serve as artistic and theological bookends to the liturgy with the Creed at the center. The Creed summarizes our understanding of the object of our worship, the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I have already spoken of the Invocation as directing our attention to the Trinity as the subject of our gifts and the object of our worship. The three ecumenical creeds, indeed in their placement, show the centrality of a trinitarian creed in our liturgy. The confession of the Trinity is placed near the climax of the Service of the Word – the sermon. Some liturgies indicate that the creed is said prior to the sermon and others just after it. In both locations, the creed is a summary of the word – the key to our understanding of our triune God's gifts to us.

Confessing the Apostles' Creed, Lutheran worshipers acknowledge the mystery of the Trinity and the name by which we have been claimed in baptism.[79] With the Nicene Creed, the errors of the past are rejected and the biblical truths of the three persons of the Trinity are affirmed. Occasionally,

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[78]Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996).
[79]Small Catechism, VI, 9-10 (Kolb andWengert, *Book of Concord*, 363).
[80]Norman Nagel, "Holy Baptism," in Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, 262.

usually on Trinity Sunday, the Athanasian Creed is spoken by the congregation as they proclaim the mystery of the Godhead in three persons—"not three uncreated or three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible."

The Aaronic blessing is a unique Lutheran contribution to evangelical-catholic worship. Most worship services end with a dismissal or the Pauline benediction. Lutherans have followed Martin Luther in re-introducing this blessing which was commanded by God Himself.[80] As Luther D. Reed notes:

> The Benediction is the final sacramental feature of the Service. It is more than a prayer for blessing. It imparts a blessing in God's Name, giving positive assurance of the grace and peace of God to all who receive it in faith. God's command to Moses (Num. 6:22-27) and our Lord's final act in taking leave of His disciples on the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50) strongly support this conviction.[81]

Although the service concludes with the Benediction, God's activities continue throughout the week as God's people are empowered for service of word and deed. In addition, the service is eschatological, preparing us for eternity. John Kleinig, writing about the graciousness of God's gifts to us, said, "In worship He gives us as much of Himself as we can receive this side of heaven, so as to prepare us for eternal intimacy with Him in heaven."[82]

V. Beyond the Divine Service

A. Other Trinitarian Witnesses

I have mentioned the texts of our Lutheran hymnody, which reflects strongly our trinitarian theology. As noted earlier, many hymns include doxological stanzas. Other hymn texts give voice to specific aspects of the Trinity. Musicologist Lionel Pike has noted another aspect of liturgical music that is more subtly trinitarian: the use of triple time, three pitches or three-note phrases. He has documented numerous Christian musicians who have utilized these triplicates as ways to celebrate the depth of trinitarian texts.[83] Therefore, the Trinity is not only in the texts, but on the lips and voices of the

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[81]Martin Luther, "Order of Mass and Communion," *LW* 53:30.

[82]Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 384.

[83]Kleinig, "Biblical View," 251.

[84]Lionel Pike, "Church Music I: Before the Civil War," in Ian Spink, ed., *The Seventeenth Century*, Blackwell History of Music in Britain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992): 66-96.

people as the congregation participates in a most intimate way with the Trinity.[84]

In Matins and Vespers, we see the Trinity explicated in the liturgy. The invocations, doxologies, and benedictions give witness to the trinitarian faith of the worshipers. In the midst of these services are Scripture readings and prayers and, for our consideration, the peculiar form of song, the canticles. Unique among them is the *Te Deum Laudamus*, which is one of the greatest trinitarian confessions in the liturgy of the church. The origin of this great hymn of the church dates to the years following the Arian controversy, particularly in Western Europe.[85] Martin Luther included it in his list of creeds of the church.[86] Joining with angels, all the heavenly hosts, the apostles, and the martyrs, the three persons of the Trinity are explicitly addressed and praised with the thrice-holy. The traditional canticles, the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus*, and the *Nunc Dimittis*, conclude with the traditional doxology, affirming the God or Lord spoken of in the text is none other than the Triune God.

Finally, I can only mention in passing the import of the Church Year. Acknowledging the presence of the Trinity also influenced our liturgical calendar, as we celebrate the Father's Day on Christmas, the Son's Day on Easter, and the Spirit's Day on Pentecost, along with the doctrinal Festival of the Holy Trinity. The festival season of the Church Year directs the attention of the worshipers on specific activities of each person of the Trinity, yet draws our overall experience of the Trinity's work in our lives.

B. A Contemporary Concern

I would like to conclude with a few comments on recent innovations in the area of worship. Popular songs used in contemporary services (of whatever stripe or detail) reflect a popular American deity, expressed in vague terms so that one is never sure if it is personal or impersonal, powerless or powerful, linked with historical events or distanced from them—even songs about Jesus as a friend, lover, and companion, seldom complete the biblical imagery by also portraying Him as the blood-stained criminal on a Roman tool of torture who dies for the sins of the whole world. The language of the songs

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[85]Marilyn Kay Stulken, "Singing the Trinity," *Liturgy: Journal of The Liturgical Conference* 13 (Winter 1996): 28-35.

[86]Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *Profiles in Belief*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 148-151.

[87]Martin Luther, "The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith, 1538," *LW* 34:197-229, names the *Te Deum* as the third creed after the Apostles' and Athanasian creeds. Earlier he had prepared a paraphrase of it for congregational singing (*LW* 53:171-175).

emphasize God's awesomeness over against God's graciousness and the distinctive activity of each person is often clouded.

I came across a "creed" prepared for an informal service, which began with these words: "I believe God is real and the world was created with *me* in mind. I believe I am loved by a loving Heavenly Father who knows *all about me* and is prepared to *meet my every need. . . .*"[87] Such language points to the worshiper as the center of worship rather than the Triune God. When the worshiper is the center of attention, or the service is centered on the seeker, there will be a distorted focus in our worship.[88] James Torrence warns that a anthropocentric form of worship emphasizes human activities to the detriment of understanding God's initiating and continuing work in worship: "In theological language," he says," this means that the only priesthood is our priesthood, the only offering our offering, the only intercessions our intercessions."[89] Such a service no longer is trinitarian and orthodox.

I believe it is safe to say, that it is not in the overuse, but the underuse of trinitarian language that has brought about a crisis in trinitarian worship.

One author, in talking about the Trinity in worship, offered three guidelines for speaking about the Trinity, which are not profound, but are certainly worthy of reflection for anyone considering alternative terms in liturgical language:

> 1. The ways we speak about the Trinity should reflect co-equality among the three persons, rather than a subordination of one to another. The triune reality is eternal; though the Word is begotten and the Spirit proceeds, this does not refer to a time sequence, but to the distinctive relationship of Word and Spirit to Source.
>
> 2. The unity of the trinitarian persons should also be lifted up in Christian worship.
>
> 3. The distinctiveness of each partner should not be blurred but recognized in Christian worship.[90]

I would add a fourth point: The regular use of God's revealed name, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," is necessary to retain a liturgically orthodox worship life of a Christian community.

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[88]"Contemporary Worship Service," St. Paul Lutheran Church and School, Grafton, Wisconsin (February 23, 2003), 7.

[89]Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 80-81.

[90]Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 20.

[91]Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 27.

VI. Conclusion

The importance of worship and the Trinity is evident in the close connection between our theology and our liturgy. Our liturgy is most doxological when it is theologically centered in God's self-disclosure as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Lutheran worship is trinitarian, not Unitarian; christocentric, not anthropocentric; incarnational, not theoretical; sacramental, not sacrificial; catholic and evangelical, not sectarian and denominational; as long as it keeps its focus on biblical and confessional expressions of God's revelation. Lutherans can rejoice in our catholic-evangelical form of worship that is scripturally-based, christologically-focused, and doxologically-directed to our Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I conclude with the words of the traditional collect for Trinity Sunday:

> Almighty and everlasting God, you have given your servants in the confession of the true faith [the gracious ability] to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and, in the majestic power, to adore the Unity; we ask that you make firm this faith that we may be fortified from all adversities; who, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.[91]

[92]Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 518 (my translation).

The Trinity in Contemporary Theology: Questioning the Social Trinity

Norman Metzler

Introduction

I undertake this paper with some fear and trepidation. Now it is appropriate for anyone to approach the doctrine of the Trinity with fear and trembling because of the very nature of the topic. But I do so for a number of additional reasons. For one, this study calls into question the insights of some of the theological giants of our time: Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg. For another, I share much in common with the futurist theological approach of Pannenberg and Moltmann; indeed, Wolfhart Pannenberg is my *Doktorvater*, and I owe him a profound debt of gratitude for his theological insights and personal guidance. Furthermore, I very much appreciate some aspects of the work of the social trinitarians. I wish in one sense that I could find the foundations for those concepts in the Scriptures and in the doctrine of the Trinity as intended and developed by the early church fathers. Perhaps most unsettling for me is the thought that these insights of our brilliant contemporary theologians are correct, and I am simply unable to grasp them.

Nonetheless, with fear and trembling I dare to raise questions about this social understanding of the Trinity, certainly the most prominent and profound development in trinitarian thinking today. There are, to be sure, a variety of issues relative to the Trinity that are currently under discussion and development, such as whether the doctrine is even relevant in our time, whether the trinitarian language is so sexist as to render the doctrine useless in its present form, whether a renewed trinitarian vision can bridge denominational boundaries. However, in my judgment, the issue of the social Trinity includes of necessity engagement with many of these issues, and is the common denominator for virtually all contemporary trinitarian explorations, and therefore can serve to introduce us to the general issues surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity.

I raise my concerns about the social understanding of the Trinity because for a long time, as this understanding of the Trinity has become more and more dominant in theology, I have had a sense of dis-ease with it. Something in my understanding of the Trinity does not sit right with these new developments, and so I have had to examine them more closely. In so doing,

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I have felt confirmed in being at least sufficiently suspicious of the validity of some aspects of these approaches to raise them with you.

My reflections are very much of an exploratory nature, and I will presume to do no more than raise some questions concerning this contemporary social approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, and propose the possibility of some alternative perspectives. Furthermore, I do so cogniscent of the very real possibility that my thinking is misguided, my understanding clouded, and my questions inappropriate in the face of much more profound theological insights. Nonetheless, given all of these disclaimers, I shall begin with an overview of some of the major figures in contemporary trinitarian thinking, and then add my own questions and constructive observations regarding the social or communitarian conception of the Trinity.

I. The Social Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity has experienced a powerful reemergence in modern theology, in contrast to its relative neglect in nineteenth-century theology. True, Hegel did develop a philosophical trinitarianism, which has had a significant impact upon contemporary trinitarian thought. But it is generally recognized that the groundbreaking efforts of Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics*, which treats this doctrine as prolegomenon to and structural motif for his entire theological project, were in sum the major impetus for the new train of thought regarding the doctrine of the Trinity.[1]

The rise of interest in the Trinity, however, is particularly significant because of its chief expression in the social model of the Trinity. Most theologians trading on this approach to the Trinity maintain that it is rooted in the trinitarian theology of the church fathers, particularly the Eastern or Greek Cappadocian fathers. The basis for the current resurgence of the doctrine of the Trinity is a reevaluation of the concept of "person." Whereas classical theology, it is claimed, has understood "person" in a substantial sense, as individual separate from communal relatedness, contemporary

[1]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, bk. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd edition, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 299.

trinitarian thinking concludes that "person" has more to do with relationality and communion than with divine splendid isolation.[2]

The shift from trinitarian substantiality to relationality has been so widespread that virtually all theologians today tend to agree that the ancient ontological understanding of God needs to be reconceptualized. The key element in revising substantialist or Aristotelian categories for understanding the Trinity is to be found in the affirmation of the principle of relationality. God needs to be reconceived as relational; the idea of person-in-relationship is almost universally assumed.[3] This trend toward a social model of the Trinity has brought together traditionally very diverse theological schools, such as feminist and liberationist, evangelical and process theologians, all of whom in their ways deem the social Trinity as the best way of understanding God. Indeed, John Gresham's survey of the variety of contemporary theologians espousing the social trinitarian view results in his claiming: "This provides the strange sight, in the pluralistic world of contemporary theology, of Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, liberation, feminist, evangelical and process theologians agreeing on a particular trinitarian model of God!"[4]

Our first task, then, is to give an overview of some of the major explications of the Trinity in contemporary theology that have moved us into the present avalanche of social trinitarian thinking. As was noted at the outset, Karl Barth's work is considered to be one of the two most influential forces in the rise of our current wave of social trinitarian theology. As Ted Peters suggests in his book *God As Trinity* (82):

> The major contributors to the contemporary rethinking of the doctrine of the Trinity either extend principles already proffered by Barth or else follow lines of thought that parallel his Church Dogmatics. Most specifically, they rely upon the priority of revelation-analysis and Barth's belief that the historical event of Jesus Christ belongs to the becoming of God proper.

Barth treats the Trinity in close connection with the concept of revelation, seeking to make clear that the doctrine of the Trinity develops out of a revelational rather than a philosophical or ontological basis. In moving from

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[2]In this survey of contemporary trinitarian theology I am indebted to Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2001); and John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.)

[3]Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 34.

[4]John Gresham, "The Social Model of the Trinity and Its Critics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993): 327.

the economic to the immanent Trinity, he avoids any speculative approach to this doctrine; every aspect of the faith must be grounded solidly in the triune revelation of God. In his revelational trinitarianism, Barth set the stage for the ensuing discussion of the relationship between God revealed in the economy of salvation and God within the eternal divine life *in se*.

As for how we are to conceive of the three members of the Trinity, Barth holds that God can have only one personality, for if Jesus Christ were a personality different from the Father, He would not be the Father's self-revelation.[5] He therefore suggests abandoning the term "person" to refer to the members of the Trinity, because that word inevitably implies "personality," in the sense of three centers of consciousness individualistically conceived, which would amount to tritheism.[6] Barth prefers the Cappadocian terminology of three mutually related modes or ways of being of the one God. He connects God's personhood or subjectivity with the divine substance or "ousia" rather than with the three "hypostases."

Barth holds that within the inner divine being there is relationship; God is not alone, but rather in the simplicity of His essence He is threefold—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, mutually related, loving one another eternally.[7] This immanent trinitarian relationality is then reflected in the community of God and man in Jesus Christ, in the believing community of faith, and in the co-partnership of people in society and as male and female.[8] Thus the understanding of the Trinity as relational illuminates our human relationships, which are created by God to reflect His own being, the *imago dei*.

Karl Rahner is the other major modern theologian credited with bringing the doctrine of the Trinity to the fore once again, in a new and relevant fashion, working out of the Roman Catholic tradition. Like Barth, he had difficulty with the traditional language, which in his view has an effect on our understanding of the content of the doctrine. He is critical of using "person" in an individualistic, modern sense. He follows kerygmatic and salvation history in seeing the persons of the Trinity as three distinct manners of subsisting.[9] Subsistence in his view involves distinction, particularity, concreteness, and relationship. He wishes to make clear that each manner of subsisting within the Trinity has a distinctive character while at the same time the three manners reveal to us the true being of God.

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[5]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1:350.
[6]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1:351, 355.
[7]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III, bk. 2, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 218.
[8]Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 132.
[9]Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 109.

Rahner is perhaps best known for his formula "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity," often referred to as Rahner's Rule.[10] Rahner works with a salvation-historical or *heilsgeschichtliche* approach to theology, and seeks to articulate his theology over against the Roman Catholic neo-scholasticism in which he was trained, but which in his view rendered the doctrine of the Trinity irrelevant to Christian faith and contemporary theology.[11] In Rahner's view, the neo-scholastics (following Thomas Aquinas himself) had so separated the divine unity from the divine threeness that the former could be expounded upon without reference to the latter. Furthermore, the Trinity doctrine as a whole could be developed without reference to the revelation of the three persons in salvation history. In failing to reckon sufficiently with the trinitarian divine work in the economy of salvation, the neo-scholastics suggested that any of the trinitarian members, not only the Son, could have become incarnate.[12] They stood at the end of a long process in Western theology that began with Augustine and was elucidated by Aquinas, according to which the threefold activity of God in salvation history was separated from the threefoldness of God in eternity. In so doing, they speculated upon the intertrinitarian relations apart from any reference to the salvation-historical activity of the three persons.

This in effect replaced the Christian understanding of the incarnation of the Logos with the view of a generic God becoming human. Rahner sees this as separating God-in-eternity from salvation history and rendering the incarnation superfluous to God's inner being, which then remains unaffected by it. This risks eliminating any true self-communication or revelation of God to humans within history.[13] In response, Rahner tries to understand just what it means to say that it is the Son who is incarnate in Jesus, as well as to indicate the significance that the role Jesus plays in salvation history has for the place of the Son in the divine inner-trinitarian life.

Rahner's theological project would seem to raise significant questions about the traditional doctrine of the immutability of God. If God *in se* is the same as God in His salvation work, then this in turn suggests that God changes in and through His relations with history. Rahner answers by distinguishing between God changing in His divine being and changing in another; God

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[10]Rahner, *The Trinity*, 72. The designation of Rahner's methodological principle as "Rahner's Rule" is attributed by Ted Peters to Roger E. Olson. See Peters, *God as Trinity*, 213, n. 33.

[11]See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Introduction," in Rahner, *The Trinity*, viii, for Rahner's engagement with neo-scholasticism.

[12]Rahner, *The Trinity*, 11.

[13]Rahner, *The Trinity*, 99-101.

created the human creature so as to be a proper vehicle for God's own becoming-in-self-expression.[14] In assuming human nature, God can "become" while in Himself remaining immutable.

While Rahner sought to clarify the doctrine of the Trinity through his unique formulation, his Rule still leaves room for interpretation of what it entails. It is understood by Ted Peters to mean that the relationality God experiences through Christ's saving relationship to the world is constitutive of trinitarian relations proper. God's relations *ad extra* become God's relations *ad intra*.[15] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, on the other hand, suggests that the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity is the complete giving of God's self to the creature; what is given in the economy of salvation is God as such.[16]

Some theologians have objected that no strict identity can be posited between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. LaCugna, following Walter Kasper, replies that Rahner intended his axiom to be seen as providing a methodological rather than an ontological insight.[17] She explains, "the order of theological knowledge must adhere to the historical form of God's self-communication in Christ and the Spirit. Knowledge of God takes place through Christ and the Holy Spirit, according to the order (*taxis*) of the divine missions."[18] Trinitarian theologians since Rahner have sought to treat with utmost seriousness the epistemological link between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity.

In fact, some theologians since Barth and Rahner have taken their insights in the direction of reconceiving the relationship of time and eternity, so that what happens in the history of salvation becomes epistemologically and even ontologically constitutive of the content of eternal life. Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, two of the foremost trinitarian theologians of our time, are convinced that an historical understanding of the Trinity facilitates a necessary move away from the focus on the one divine subject that still held sway over the work of Barth and Rahner.

Moltmann begins with the cross of Christ; for him the cross is not only the event that effects human reconciliation with God, but also constitutes God's self within history as the Triune God. For Moltmann, the basis of the Trinity lies in the separation-in-unity that God experienced within the divine life in the event of the cross. As Jesus surrendered Himself on the cross to suffer

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[14]Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 220.

[15]Peters, *God as Trinity*, 96.

[16]LaCugna, "Introduction," xiv.

[17]Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 276.

[18]LaCugna, "Introduction," xv.

godforsakenness, the Father likewise experienced the anguish of being separated from the Son, yet in the process both entered a new unity in the Spirit. He explains, "What happened on the cross was an event between God and God. It was a deep division in God himself, in so far as God abandoned God and contradicted himself, and at the same time a unity in God, in so far as God was at one with God and corresponded to himself."[19]

Contrary to classical theism, God for Moltmann is not immutable. Because the historical event of the cross is constitutive of God's eternal being, God not only affects the world but also is affected by it, above all by humankind. If one conceives of the Trinity as an action of love in the suffering and death of Jesus, then the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, stemming from the cross of Christ.[20]

At the same time, Moltmann rejects the idea that God and the world are inherently interdependent, such as one might find in process theology. The historicity of God is God's free and gracious choice from eternity to go outside of Himself; in God, "necessity" and "freedom" are transcended by God's own nature, which is love. Moltmann bases this approach on his novel understanding of creation as an act of divine self-limitation that began already within the divine life, which he terms "trinitarian panentheism." [21] In order to create a world "outside" Himself, God must have made room in advance for a finitude in Himself. God created within the infinite divine reality a finite "space" and "time" for the world, by "withdrawing" Himself from that space and time, marking it as "godforsaken" space, which He enters in time through Christ, and redeems through the cross from its godforsakenness.[22]

Moltmann uses the image of "perichoresis" to describe the divine unity, referring to the intimate indwelling and complete interpenetration of the persons in one another. In contrast to the patristic approach which begins with impersonal philosophical terms, he argues that the Bible reveals three persons at work, not one. Hence an understanding of the Trinity must begin

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[19]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 244. While Moltmann's rhetoric here, as often in his writings, is interesting homiletically or existentially, it is not particularly heuristic systematically. "God against God," if understood in any logical, systematic theological sense, would have to make God a plural God, and Moltmann's trinitarianism indeed guilty of charges of tritheism; furthermore, any appeal to "paradox" is simply begging the systematic question. The Ps. 22 context of Jesus' cry on the cross makes any kind of strong, "ontological" separation of God from God inadmissible, for it is the cry of one who, in his suffering and feelings of abandonment, is likewise fully aware of and dependent upon the merciful dominion of God.

[20]Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 249.

[21]Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 98-103.

[22]This image of "godforsakenness" harks back to the work of Barth.

with the fellowship of a plurality of persons, understood as three centers of conscious activity, and only then progress to the question of their unity. He characterizes his approach as a "social doctrine of the Trinity."[23] For Moltmann, all interpretations of the Trinity that reduce the three persons to modes of a single subjectivity inevitably set God over against the world and imply a hierarchical, monarchical relation between them.

Moltmann's critique of classical monotheism and his social doctrine of the Trinity are therefore not simply abstract theory, but have implications for human social and political interaction. He sees traditional monotheism as being used to justify political and ecclesiastical totalitarianism, and so is critical of hierarchical power structures.

The practical application of his social Trinity finds its expression in human fellowship, equality, and interdependence. The doctrine of the Trinity is accordingly a "critical principle" for theology in its mission of transforming the world. Moltmann urges a rediscovery of what he considers the biblical concept of God's triunity as the community and fellowship among three equal persons, rather than a monarchy of one person over the others and the world. Only by focusing on the distinct subjectivities of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can a doctrine of God be developed that is characterized by mutuality rather than lordship. For Moltmann, the eschatological kingdom cannot be a universal monarchy of the Lord of creation, but rather a harmonious fellowship of liberated nature and humans with God. Moltmann's trinitarian thinking has deeply influenced liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff, as well as feminist thinkers such as Elizabeth Johnson.[24]

The most comprehensive expression of a trinitarian theology rooted in the connection between God and history, to which Barth gave impetus and that Moltmann nurtures, is to be found in the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg. This doctrine plays the central role in his three-volume magnum opus, *Systematic Theology*.[25] With Moltmann and following Barth, Pannenberg seeks to ground the Trinity on God's self-revelation in Christ, that is, on the way that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit appear and relate to each other in the event of revelation in the life and message of Jesus.[26] Only after this does he treat the

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[23]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 19; also 150, 174-176.

[24]See Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 205-209.

[25]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-1998).

[26]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, I:299.

unity of God found in the divine attributes. His understanding of the immanent Trinity thus flows from the economic Trinity. He agrees with Moltmann that the traditional attempts to derive the plurality of the trinitarian persons from a concept of God as one being is problematic, because God remains a single subject rather than three persons.

Pannenberg moves directly from the concept of revelation to the Trinity; he looks to Jesus' relationship to the Father, especially in his message of the Kingdom of God, for an understanding of Jesus as the Son, and of the Spirit as a third person who is different from while being bound to the Father and the Son.[27] The doctrine of the Trinity in this approach becomes the explication of the relationship of Jesus to the Father and the Spirit.

Pannenberg reinterprets the traditional understanding of the term "self-differentiation" within the Trinity. Rather than referring, as it does in the fathers and classic trinitarian formulations, to the bringing forth of the second and third persons through the Father, which implicitly gives priority to the Father, Pannenberg understands self-differentiation as a giving of oneself to one's counterpart, and thereby gaining one's identity from the other—this being in fact the essence of personhood. "Person" is thus a correlative or relational term, for self-differentiation involves dependency on the other for one's identity. Applied to the trinitarian persons, one must conclude that the mutual self-differentiation and interdependence of Father, Son, and Spirit constitutes the concrete form of the trinitarian relations.[28]

Concretely, Jesus differentiated Himself from the Father, subordinating Himself to the Father's will, and so gave place to the Father's claim to deity, while gaining His own identity as the Son. For Pannenberg, this is not simply a statement about the earthly Jesus; in Jesus' glorifying the Father's deity, the relationship between Jesus and His Father belongs to the eternity of God, God's immanent being. Similarly, to complete the Trinity, he observes: "as Jesus glorifies the Father and not himself, and precisely in so doing shows himself to be the Son of the Father, so the Spirit glorifies not himself but the Son, and in him the Father."[29] Hence the mutual and reciprocal relations among the trinitarian persons define the divinity of each person as a *received* divinity; each receives divinity as a person-in-relationship with the other two.[30]

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[27]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, I:304.

[28]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, I: 308-319.

[29]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, I: 315.

[30]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1980), 2:110.

Foundational to God's self-differentiation in Pannenberg's theology is the concept of God's being, which is His deity, as linked inextricably to His rule over the world. "God's being is His rule," Pannenberg asserts, in a dictum now labeled Pannenberg's Principle.[31] He argues:

> To believe in one god means to believe that one power dominates all. . . . Only the god who proves himself master over all is true. This does not mean that God could not be God apart from the existence of finite beings, for God certainly can do without anyone or anything else. It does mean that, if there are finite beings, then to have power over them is intrinsic to God's nature. The deity of God is His rule.[32]

This threeness of the trinitarian persons serves as the basis for Pannenberg's understanding of the oneness of God. He distances himself from the psychological approach which dominates the Western tradition from Augustine to Barth, with its focus on God as the divine subject, because it insulates a supposedly immutable God from time and history. The concept of mutual self-differentiation implies that the three trinitarian persons are independent centers of action and not merely different ways in which the one divine subject exists. This likewise eliminates the traditional tendency to gain divine unity by reducing the persons to relations of origin in the one Godhead, as reflected in the traditional terms "generation" and "procession."

Without the kingdom, God cannot be God. Thus the Godhood of the Father depends on God's eschatological reign. Yet the coming reign of God is dependent upon the sending of Jesus into the world and the work of the Spirit who anticipates the reality of the kingdom in the world. Hence the deity of the Father is dependent on the other two members of the Trinity, and the category of relation is therefore not external to, but inherent in, the divine being. Indeed, the divine essence is ultimately "the epitome of the personal relations among Father, Son and Spirit," which relations unfold throughout the course of the history of the world. At the same time, Pannenberg (along with others) cautions that enthusiasm for the social model of the Trinity not degenerate into tritheism. The doctrine of the Trinity does not propose that God is three persons who have relations, but three subsistent relations that are, in fact, persons.

This concept of interpersonal or relational personhood, expressed in Eastern theology in terms of "being as communion," has therefore emerged as a

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[31]Roger E. Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 199.

[32]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 55.

dominant principle in contemporary trinitarian theology, providing as well a point of connection between theology and anthropology. The Eastern theologian John D. Zizioulas, mainly through his collection of essays *Being as Communion*, has been very influential in promulgating the idea that the divine being is constituted by the communion of the three trinitarian persons.[33]

Catherine Mowry LaCugna in particular has appropriated this concept of being as communion perhaps most innovatively and influentially of any Western theologian in her book *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*.[34] In her analysis, post-Nicene theologians separated *theologia* from *oikonomia*, and concentrated on the former, resulting in a one-sided theology of God that had little connection with the economy of salvation in Christ and the Spirit, with incarnation and grace, and therefore had little to do with the Christian life.[35] Theology must realize that rather than an economic and immanent Trinity, there is only the *oikonomia*, which is "the concrete realization of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space, history and personality."[36] Her ontology of personhood, reflecting Zizioulas' language of *ekstasis* and *hypostasis*, holds that to be a person is to be both open beyond oneself, and to embody the totality of one's nature. Thus every human person uniquely exemplifies humanness, just as each of the three divine persons uniquely exemplifies deity.[37] A theology that works out of our experience of salvation leads us to conclude that "God's way of being in relationship with us" is in fact God's personhood, for "God for us is who God is as God."[38]

LaCugna perceives the difference in the Greek and Latin traditions, in their affirmation of communion as the nature of reality, to be in their application of the ontology to the divine reality. The West focused on the communion of the three persons as an occurrence within the eternal divine reality, whereas the East situated the mystery of the communion of the three within the divine economy. The effect of the Latin approach is to predicate God's attributes to the divine essence, rather than to the divine persons. Here she sides with the Greek tradition. Thus immutability is a characteristic of the divine personhood, meaning that God is unchangeably personal. Likewise the

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[33]John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians 4 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

[34]Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

[35]LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210.

[36]LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

[37]LaCugna, *God for Us*, 290. This example is reminiscent of S. Basil; see Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 25.

[38]LaCugna, *God for Us*, 304.

incomprehensibility of God is freed from the substantialist ontology which ties it to a divine substance that lies beyond the limitations of the human mind. Rather it means that as person God is "indefinable, unique, ineffable," just as all persons are. What is truly worthy of being called incomprehensible is the "unfathomable mystery of a God who comes to us through Christ in the Spirit."[39] For LaCugna, the Greek patristic trinitarianism, by focusing on monarchy as a property of a person and not a substance, opened the way for it to be communicable to and shared by more than one person. This in turn has far-reaching social implications for her, for it promotes mutuality and undermines all hierarchical structures among humans.

This brief overview of current trends in trinitarian theology should make abundantly clear that the psychological model has given way to variations on the theme of divine sociality or community. This ascendancy of the focus on the three trinitarian persons has in turn opened the way to an understanding of what it means to be human in which the triune life becomes the final touchstone for speaking about human personhood.[40] LaCugna summarizes the impact of this renewal of trinitarian theology: "The doctrine of the Trinity ultimately must measure its reflections on personhood by the revelation of divine personhood in the face of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit."[41]

II. A Critique of the Social Trinity

(1). In reflecting critically upon the current trinitarian scene, I must first acknowledge the value and magnitude of these modern insights into the doctrine of the Trinity.

(2). Certainly the rediscovery of the historical nature of the Trinity recaptures the biblical dynamic of the God who acts, over against the more static substantialist explications of God in the scholastic tradition.

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[39]LaCugna, *God for Us*, 301-303. Of the theologians discussed above, LaCugna most clearly seems intent upon stripping away any transcendent reality of God in favor of a totally kenotic or economic understanding of God as social or communal Trinity – so much so that even the Orthodox theologian Michael Hryniuk, who is otherwise sympathetic to LaCugna's approach, issues the caution: "Theological re-conceptions of the doctrine of the Trinity are obviously necessary, but they ought not be too quick to discard the inner life of the Trinity with the bath water of sterile speculations that may have historically surrounded it" (Michael Hryniuk, "Triumph or Defeat of the Trinity? An Eastern Christian Response to Catherine LaCugna," *Diakonia* 33 (2000): 25-26).

[40]Grenz, *Social God and Relational Self*, 57.

[41]LaCugna, *God for Us*, 292-293.

(3). The approach to understanding God through God's self-revelation in history, acknowledging that we can in fact only know God through His revealing of Himself in time and space, is critical for any theological project.

(4). The insights into the inextricability of the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity, if to be sure not their total identity, carry great practical as well as theological weight.

(5). The renewed emphasis upon the personal character of God in relationship to us, God's intimate engagement with humanity and the world through God the Son incarnate in the flesh, is highly commendable, in contrast to any speculative, abstract efforts to define God apart from our human experience. Our Christian theology must speak of a God who is indeed relational, who relates to real people in a real world, a God who understands our human condition from the inside.

Thus there is much that is commendable in these newer social trinitarian theological programs. Nonetheless, there is also something in these proposals that cause me to question whether they are indeed concordant with Scripture and the intent of the church fathers as they framed the trinitarian doctrine, or whether in fact they are working with more contemporary concepts of persons and relationships and are reading into the doctrine of the Trinity their own agendas or insights into the faith. I will explicate my questions or concerns from the following perspectives.

First, I want to affirm a number of "personal" elements in the understanding of the Trinity. The Triune God is a *personal* God, in the fully modern sense of being both a distinct, individual center of consciousness and potential for action, and a being-in-relationship who in fact chooses to live out His being in His relationship to creation. Furthermore, God has chosen to become a distinct *personality* in the incarnation of the Son in Jesus the Christ. Jesus was a full human being with a full personality just like all humans, meaning that He was characterized both by *ekstasis* and *hypostasis*, an openness beyond Himself and a distinctiveness within Himself. Indeed, the Christology of the fathers took pains to maintain the full humanity of Jesus Christ in the incarnation, over against Docetism in all its forms.

Also, I recognize and affirm the *personal relationship* between the Father and the Son in the incarnation. The human, incarnate Son relates very personally to God as His personal, loving Father, and the Father affirms the Son incarnate as His beloved one, in whom He is well pleased. Both the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds make clear that in the economy of salvation there is a type of "progression" or "development" in God. According to His divine nature, the second person of the Trinity, who is incarnate in time in Jesus, is recognized as having been the Son *persona* of God from all eternity. The

gracious and redeeming dimension or aspect or face of God which we know through God's self-revelation in Christ has always been characteristic of God eternally, in His essential being; He is the only-begotten or solely generated unique Son of the Father, identified in the incarnation with the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet in this unique incarnation the Son *persona* of God subordinates Himself and is obedient to His heavenly Father, self-limiting of Himself in time and space in His various human characteristics.

As initially and continually in His creation, so also now in His incarnation, God chooses to be self-limiting according to His human nature, expressly for the sake of revealing His gracious and unconditionally loving character which alone can save us and redeem all creation. Correlatively, in the historical dynamic of the economic Trinity, the Father is superordinate over the Son as human, while obviously participating equally with the Son in the personal divine reality which is self-revealing in the *persona* of the Son incarnate.

Likewise the Spirit is another *persona* of God, proceeding from the Father and the Son in the economy of salvation. The life-giving Spirit is associated especially in and through the self-revelation of God in Christ with the sanctifying power of God at work in the world for the sake of reconciling all humanity to God. While participating fully in the divine reality, the Spirit is distinguishable in Its work in the economy of salvation as a particular *persona* or face or activity of the one God, the one divine reality.

Thus we come to an understanding of God as three *personae* or *hypostases* in the patristic sense, active in the history of the world for our salvation in three distinctive ways or forms. We cannot know and experience this God except through His self-revelation in history, hence as economic Trinity. But we must remind ourselves that the doctrine of the Trinity was first and foremost developed to maintain the full divinity of the Son, for unless the Son were true God, fully participating in the divinity of God, He could not be our Savior. I question whether the trinitarian formulations of the fathers as expressed in the creeds were intended to communicate a tri-personal or social understanding of the deity in the modern sense, such as we have heard expressed above, in which three distinct and separate personalities are in some fashion not only economically but eternally three subjectivities mutually interrelating, as being-in-communion. The fathers, in my estimation, were far too sensitive to the charge of tritheism to have risked an understanding of God such as we hear expounded today in the concept of the social or communal Trinity.

I think the test case of this problematic is to be found particularly in the *persona* of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is indeed one distinct *persona,* one distinguishable dimension or operation of the personal divine *ousia* or essence. Furthermore, the Spirit is the ongoing presence and power of the

personal God in the world and its history, the divine "Intercessor" or "Mediator" form of God with us following the Ascension of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the Holy Spirit is clearly not of the same "personal" character as the Father and the Son; It does not stand in the same kind of parallel or analogous "personal" relationship to the Father or the Son, as do the Father and the Son to one another. Yet our creeds, reflecting the thought of the fathers, do affirm that the Spirit participates every bit as much in the divine reality as the Father and the Son; while it is not "personal" in the same sense as the other two, the Spirit is nonetheless designated as being every bit as much a distinct *persona,* parallel to or analogous to the other two divine *personae.* Therefore the term "*persona*" and the meaning it is intended to carry in describing the Trinity *cannot* be equated with some self-conscious interpersonal center of action envisioned by the social trinitarians, and as exemplified in the incarnational interpersonal relationship between the Father and the Son. And while the Son *persona* and Spirit *persona* may be seen as somehow subordinate to or derivative from the Father *persona* in the economic trinitarian sense, at the same time that the Father is dependent upon the *personae* of the Son and Spirit for His economic role or activity – such that I can agree with Pannenberg that the history of the world becomes the history of God[42] – still, I question the necessity of concluding from this that the immanent Trinity must be understood socially, interpersonally in its essential or eschatological reality.

I am asking whether it could be possible for God economically to be relational, and indeed in the relations between the Father and Son to be incarnationally interpersonal, and yet to acknowledge that this relationality has to do with the creation and the incarnation *economically,* and does not warrant being read into the divine personal being of God *in se.* Certainly we can only know God *in se* through the God *pro nobis,* for us in His economy of salvation, but I am not sure that this truth warrants or issues logically in our describing God immanently as three equal interpersonal, social, communitarian entities.

What I sense in the social trinitarian approaches is the tendency to see God the Son who was incarnate in time as *eternally incarnate* in relating to the Father, hence an *immanent* dynamic of Father/Son relations. To be sure, retroactively we know that the God who was incarnate as the Son of the Father always was the kind of personal, loving God who included in His reality the desire and capacity for relationship, and thus the capacity for creation of a world and of a humanity in His image, to which He could relate. But the actual Father/Son nexus *only* became meaningful through the

[42]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* I:327.

incarnation in time, where the divine Logos or Son as humanly incarnate becomes revelatory of divinity as loving Father. The human Son reveals God as supremely gracious divine Son, that is, as the eternally redemptive dimension of God *in se*, who since the incarnation we know as the redeeming Son. We dare not succumb to the ancient heresy of "dividing the substance"[43] of the immanent deity by envisioning a subdivision *in se* of the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying personal qualities of the one God apart from the operations of the economic Trinity in the salvific history of creation.

Actually, the definition itself of God as ultimate personal reality would seem to necessitate the oneness of God immanently, rather than allowing for any substantive, ousianic plurality or relationality in the Godhead. The latter would seem to move unavoidably toward some kind of tritheistic understanding of divinity. I am thus far inclined to think that it would have appeared so also for the original framers of the doctrine of the Trinity. While they may not have expressed their awareness of the dynamic personal character of the divine Nature in the way in which modern trinitarian theologians are rightly doing, the Cappadocians, upon whom the social trinitarians depend for their support in the early church fathers, are very concerned to maintain the oneness of the *ousia* of the divine Nature or divine operations over against the distinction of the three *hypostases*. Further, the fathers disavow any plurality in the Godhead, maintaining that the *personae* or *hypostases*, while enumerated as three, cannot in analogy to three human persons be carried into the understanding of the "absolutely simple and indivisible substance" of the one divine nature.[44] While the emphasis in the Cappadocians seems to be more on the separate subsistence of the three *hypostases* than on the one *ousia*, they themselves explain the Trinity as one indivisible Godhead, one identity of nature, operating in the three modes of being, or *hypostases*. Their distinctions among the *hypostases* do not seem to correlate with contemporary efforts to explain the trinitarian persons as bound up in a communion of individual self-conscious agents.

I would agree with those trinitarians who reject the concept of the Trinity as different ways of existing of the one divine, absolute impersonal subject, according to some sort of a psychological model of Trinity. Certainly God in His essence is personal, and personal-in-relationship to humanity in creation. But that the mutual self-differentiation in the Godhead, which the fathers did assert, implies three independent, personal centers of action in eternal

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[43]Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 24:4.

[44]J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), 263-269; Schaff and Wace, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 23-29.

relationship with one another as in some sense plural entities, would seem to extend decisively beyond the bounds of the intent of the trinitarian doctrine, and invite us to embrace some type of personalistic tritheism. Pannenberg does not want the enthusiasm for the social model of the Trinity to degenerate into tritheism, but I am not sure how that can be avoided in the social Trinity schema.

I believe the contemporary social trinitarians, quite commendably, desire to see the doctrine of the Trinity become relevant to practical Christian life; accordingly, they wish to find within the very essence of God the model for appropriate human relationships of fellowship, mutuality, and love. And that these kinds of relationships are the trinitarian God's desire and destiny for humanity I have no doubt. I am also certain that God fashioned us for such relationships, and actually lived them out in His incarnational presence among us through the Son. But this does not seem to warrant identifying God as social *in se,* and may even be seen to obscure the nature of God as essentially one.

To be sure, we are privileged to know what is most important for us to know about the immanent God, because of His choice to reveal Himself to us in time. We also recognize that if God had not done what He in fact did—create a universe and a unique humanity within it, incarnate Himself for our eschatological salvation, work in us to give us faith, hope and love—if He had not done what He did, He would not be who He is . . . or perhaps in more appropriate Hebraic terms, would not be who He will be, Yahweh. Possibly the most telling argument against equating the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity is the fact that, as futurist theology argues, God is indeed historical, and thus in His ultimate reality will be known as God only eschatologically, only at the end in His actual eschatological kingly rule. Our confidence, based upon God's decisive self-revelation in Christ, is that *then* we will know that God *always was* the kind of God whom we now know proleptically through the economic Trinity. I would therefore suggest that perhaps a better way to understand the relationship of the economic to the immanent Trinity is to say that the immanent Trinity is the eschatological Trinity, and the economic Trinity is the prolepsis of the eschatological Trinity. It seems clear to me that when stated in historical terms, equating the historical (economic) Trinity with the eschatological (immanent) Trinity simply does not fit either Scriptures or the trinitarian formulations of the fathers and the creeds. Many beside me suspect that this would seem to entail precluding the freedom and true historicity of God.

I appreciate the observation of Ted Peters that "what happens in time contributes to the content of what is eternal. This applies to God as well as to the world. God's trinitarian activity in temporal history becomes constitutive

of the divine eternity. The redeemed creation is drawn up into the eternal life of God through the eschatological consummation. This is what salvation means."[45] However, if the eschatologically immanent Trinity is indeed one God, then God's history in and with the world, while constitutive of His reality, does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the *personae* of the one Triune God in time, while to be sure economically distinguishable, are somehow also socially, communally related in history, something like a continuing committee of three celestial persons working out the identity of the one God. If God of necessity must be one logically, and will be known to be one eschatologically, then it makes sense only to affirm our historical and economic experiences of God as aspects or operations of the one personal God's self-revelation in dynamic relationship with us and the world.

I would therefore lean toward an understanding of the Trinity not as social or communitarian, but rather as dynamically personal and proleptic. It seems to me that this loving personal God is working out His salvific purposes in history through what I would prefer to call His three *personae*, not to confuse His threefoldness in eschatological unity with some sort of social or personalist tritheism. But I offer my critique and these suggestions regarding the social Trinity only as tentative and provisional, and hope that at least I have spurred your thinking about this doctrine sufficiently to cause you to reflect critically upon your own understanding of this most crucial doctrine of the Christian faith, and how it actually relates to the life of those whom you teach and prepare for lives of service.

[45]Ted Peters, *God – The World's Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 109.

Teaching the Trinity

David P. Meyer

"In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more rewarding." (St. Augustine)

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* asks, "How does one preach the Trinity?" and answers, "One does not preach it at all!" What one does in preaching and catechesis is the providing of a wealth of scriptural material, sound exegesis, exposition, and explication! Even the *Catechism of Trent* postponed the Trinity doctrine till later, addressing such only after a wealth of biblical texts dealing Christ and God as creator and savior.[1] So we must deal with "Philosophical Considerations on Relating the Church's Articulation of the Trinity." Said another way, "How can we do a better job of equipping pastors, teachers, and all those who take it upon themselves the study of Scripture, the Ancient Creeds, Confessional commitment, in order to communicate the good news of the Triune God?"

Let's pretend I am a philosopher for a second! My students consider that long enough. Taking up a systematic text, a student may be offered a definition of the nature of God. After which would follow a triadic account identifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as holding all the properties of God; thus the Father, $F^{(P1...N)}$, the Son, $J^{(P1...N)}$, and the Holy Spirit, $S^{(P1...N)}$ hold a common set of properties, identifying each as God. Algebra or Leibniz dictates that if F, J, and S hold a common set of properties, by the law of the identity of indiscernibles $[(x)(y)[(y=x) > (D)(Dx=Dy)]$, it follows that F, J, and S are identical and simply one and the same.[2] "Oneness" theology, in all its varied forms, applauds at this point, quoting John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." Which in turn is to echo Exod. 3:14, "I am who I am" and Deut. 6:4, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One!" So, do we now conclude that Jesus is identical with the Father and the Holy Spirit? Not at all! Good catechetical method prevents this conclusion.

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[1] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1965, "Trinity," 299-300. Since the work was a catechism, not a dogmatics, the abundant bible references had to explicated by the catechist—appearing in the margins, not in the body of the text. *Catechismus ex Decreto Sacrosanti Concilii Trientini* (Bassani, 1700), 12-126.

[2] David Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, (Hazelwood, Mo.: Word Aflame Press). Also Thomas Weisser, *Three Persons from the Bible? Or Babylon*, (Hazelwood, Mo.: Word Aflame Press). Groups identified as oneness denominations are: the United Pentecostal Church, the Apostolic Overcoming holy Church of God, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith.

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More algebraic logic is needed! Not only do the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share a common set of God-properties, but also each holds a set of properties distinct one from the other, unshared properties. Thus, something of this form appears: $F^{(P1...N)+(X1..N)}$ & $J^{(P1...N)+(Y1...N)}$ & $S^{(P1...N)+(Z1...N)}$, which then moves us to conclude that while F, J, and S hold all the divine properties, each holds properties possessed by none other. The creed says simply, "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but there are not three Gods, but one God." We catechists then add that grammatically the "one" [Hebrew or LXX] as found in Deut. 6:4, as well as the "one" in the Greek of John 10:30 is not the "one" of identity, that is, "one and the same," but the "one-ness" as found in Gen. 2:24, where Adam and Eve are identified as "one" flesh—here both Hebrew and Greek usages are consistent. Clearly Adam and Eve are not identical but "one Flesh!" Adam and Eve are two people but one flesh; so God can be three persons but remain one God! Our catechetical task is done! Or is it?[3]

Philosophy and the "Theo-Logicians"

Recently, "Theo-logicians"[4] have complicated our task. Richard Cartwright and Dale Tuggy, in two independent philosophical essays, conclude that the Athanasian Creed is inconsistent, unintelligible, and a poor fit with the Bible—and a contradiction as well![5] We must either choose Modalism or

[3]God is distinguished from the "wisdom of God" and the "word of God," yet God could not ever be God-without-Wisdom, or God-without-Word. "One" may signal that the divine essence is shared with both the "Spirit of God" and the "Son of God." Since God would not be God without "wisdom"—nor God without "word"—both the Spirit and the Son are eternal and share in God's "One-being." See "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, eds. R. J. Feenstra and C. Plantinga (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 28. [John 10:30] "I and the Father are one"—not the "one" of simple identity, "I am the Father," nor is the text simply a "one-in-purpose" text. It is ontological, but not in the sense 'Theo-logicians' demand. More typically the exegete urges that the Father and the Son share the same essence, or divine nature. John 1:1 has already informed us that the Father and the Son are both God (*theos* not merely *theios*). The Jews saw more to the claim of Jesus than "mere" unity in purpose. John 10:24ff. shows this to be Jesus' claim to be God! "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself out to be God" (10:33). It is an issue of "being." Students may want to explore manuscript tradition on the relation of John 1:1 and 1:18. Clement, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Epiphanius read the text as "one and only God" rather than *monogenes huios*.

[4]A term I created—philosophers make up new words with ease, as do Germans.

[5]Richard Cartwright, *Philosophical Essays*, 17, available at http: www.kingsleymc.com/Clark/lists/Eyring/Notes/trinity.html. The logical problem appears in the following sentences: "The Father is God," "The Son is God," "The Spirit is

Tritheism. The law of identity of indiscernibles concludes that one must choose Modalism, to preserve the sentence, "There is exactly one God," or we must insert an indefinite article before each use of the term "God" and conclude that there are three Gods. Yet, they argue that the Athanasian Creed says we must do both!

Are Creeds True-Contradictions?

David Cunningham, wanting to be Orthodox in the "worst way," capitulates and concludes that the Athanasian Creed is a "true contradiction!"[6] After all, don't we have para-consistency, multi-value logics, as Wittgenstein has suggested? The temptation of Jesus is offered as a true contradiction: as true God, He is incapable of being tempted; as a man, He can be tempted.[7] Zwingli and the Nestorians would love Cunningham's example! Randal Rauser, putting the best construction on everything, finds Cunningham's efforts commendable, his examples provocative, but his examples of contradictions are at best paradoxes, yet none is a "true contradiction."[8]

God," "The Father is not the Son," "The Father is not the Holy Spirit," and "The Son is not the Father."

There is exactly one God. Moreover, The Father is neither made, nor created, nor begotten; the Son is from the Father alone, neither made nor created, but begotten; the Holy Spirit from the father and the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding. And what the Father is, such is the Son and such the Holy Spirit.

See Dale Tuggy, *The Trinitarian Dilemma*, available at http://www.fredonia.edu/department/Philosophy/tuggy.html, September 27, 2002. Tuggy views Peter T. Geach, Peter van Inwagen, and Richard Swinburne as examples of Tritheism. "Surely they don't mean to suggest that these persons share a common stuff or matter, or that their three propositions of matter overlap. 'Whatever it is which makes divine persons combine to make a further person" (9). Recently William Alston said, "It is a well known fact, amply borne out by the history of the discussion of the topic, that as soon as one goes beyond the automatic recital of traditional creedal phrase one inevitably leans either in the direction of modalism – the "persons" are simply different aspects of the divine being and/or activity-or tritheism – there really are three Gods, albeit very intimately connected in some way." William Alston, "Swinburne and Christian Theology," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 41 (1997): 54. See Richard Swinburne, The *Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). Dale Tuggy, *Trinitarian Dilemma*, 1.

[6]David Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

[7]See Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), Solid Declaration, III, 14–15, 541 [Hereafter abbreviated as "Tappert"].

[8]Randal Rauser, "Is the Trinity a true Contradiction?" *Quodlibet Journal* 4 (November 2002). This is also available at http://www.Quodlibet.net.

But may contradictions or near-contradictions occur where you least expect them? Chemnitz describes ancient philosophers whose accounts of God bear remarkable resemblance to Christian descriptions of God and His nature! World religion experts delight in demonstrating these remarkable similarities. Monism, Islam, Philo, Hindu writings, among others, describe the "Ultimate" in language akin to that of the Christian theology. The two sets of descriptions, pagan and Christian, must describe the same being. Medieval Scholasticism concluded the same; contemporary pluralism does the same; process theologians the same, but offer instead a new account of the nature of God.[9] Luther, Melancthon and Martin Chemnitz dismissed these similarities as a confusion of nature and grace, a "mixo-philosophico-theological"[10] scholasticism. The law of identity of indiscernibles is wrong! The philosopher's god and the God of supernatural revelation are not the same.[11] Identical predicates do not the same god name! In comparison, the philosophers' God is at least feeble, inadequate, and misleading, if not contradictory.

How Do We Proceed?

How should we proceed? Surrender to the "theo-logicians" is not the answer! Can the philosopher teach the old-dog theologian a new trick? Or have the "theo-logicians" pulled a trick on us? I suggest the latter—elementary mathematics doesn't begin with Frege, Q.V.O. Quine's *Word and Object,* or the *Principia Mathematica* of Whitehead and Russell! Mathematics begins with addition, subtraction, multiplication, etc.; number theory and system development comes later. Creeds of the sophistication of the Athanasian Creed grew up from the earthy task of exegesis, reflection, assimilation, and inferences bound up in the language and idiom of Greek and Latin traditions.

Councils attempted to confront pivotal christological issues—seeing necessity in preserving Christ as the full revelation of God and the full salvation of God as promised in the Old Testament! The creeds were never were presented as philosophical treatises, proving Monotheism vs. Tritheism, but as an effort to lift up all of the biblical evidence in preaching and teaching. The "theo-logicians" want to skip the task of addition and subtraction, and

[9]Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716) is also known for this *Theodicy,* which prompted hostile rejoinders, but was part of a tradition at times too sympathetic to Plato, Philo, Neo-Platonism. The doctrines of gradation, continuity, and fullness of plentitude have a long history—aptly described by Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard University Press, 1936).

[10]Ingolf U. Dalfert, *Theology and Philosophy* (Williston, Vt.: Blackwell, 1988), 76. This is Dalfert's colorful phrase for describing the Lutheran attitude toward scholasticism at its worst.

[11]See Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* I, trans. J. A. O. Preus (Concordia, 1989), 51-55.

move directly to number theory and the *Principia*—no wonder "heads spin" when we are all invited to see the Athanasian Creed as simple piece of logic!

How Do We Begin Teaching the Doctrine of the Trinity?

We may begin with the creedal approach, viewing God the Father as creator and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or we can begin with Christ as redeemer, who speaks of His relation to the Father and the Spirit. Martin Chemnitz chose the latter approach—his full explication of primitive heresies and creedal language appear in *The Two Natures of Christ.* In detail he deals with terms and expressions forged in the heat of early Creedal development, e.g., the hypostatic union, essence, three persons, and communicable attributes.[12] But in exposition of Christ and His work, Chemnitz finds himself creating new models for dealing with biblical texts. The *genus idiomaticum* and *genus apotelesmaticum* were tools for interpretation. The genus *maiestaticum* blossomed in the garden of biblical interpretation, joining itself to the *genus auchematicum*![13] Wittgenstein suggested that at times language was "idling"—other times in action. Any definition of the *genus* formulas would be language "idling." Only in interpretation and dealing with the texts of Scripture do the "categories" come to life! Pannenberg and Elert, as Chemnitz, begin with Christology, thereafter leading us to the Trinity doctrine.[14] Whether one commences with creation or begins with Christ, either beginning soon becomes trinitarian and its goal the same: To place into the lap of sinners the Christ child of Bethlehem, inviting them to follow this Jesus baby from Bethlehem to Golgatha and the empty tomb—and to the promise a world to come void of sin, death, and tears!

Reason, Natural Revelation, Apologetics, and Polemics

Reformed apologists, Ronald Nash as others, write as though Lutherans had no interests in apologetics. Luther's *deus absconditus* theology says otherwise.

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[12]Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971). Likewise, Pieper provides a short list of early church expressions which aid in exposition of the Trinity doctrine: *Homoousia*; or *Filioque*; or *Perichoresis*; or even the *omnia opera Trinitatis ad intra sunt indivisa*, etc. George Mather and Larry Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) urge that a solid review of early church theology provides an analytic tool for understanding characteristics of modern sects and cults.

[13]"Where you are able to say, 'Here is God,' you must also say, 'Therefore Christ the man is also there'" (Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1, trans. Walter A. Hansen [St. Louis: Concordia, 1962], 233). To review a shift from ontological Trinity to christological Trinity in Athanasius, see Robert Fox, " The Athanasian Meaning of 'Being with' or 'Of One Substance with the Father,'" *The Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (August 1960): 205-216.

[14]Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 211-253; Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wofhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 69ff.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians say otherwise. Melanchthon duly noted the ambiguity of God's revelation in nature and to reason, crushing the scholastic claim that reason can ascend to God. "While he [God] terrifies us and seems to be casting us into eternal death, human nature cannot bring itself to love a wrathful, judging punishing God."[15] If we leap from Luther to Kierkegaard, bypassing seventeenth-century Lutheran dogmaticians, we miss a wealth of polemic and apologetics dealing with Socinians and rationalism—neither of which has gone away. Our students need to review such efforts to see precisely how important sound exegesis is! My list of Lutheran thinkers writing in professional philosophy journals and doing apologetics in the open-field of philosophy is a short list. The list needs to be longer!

Oneness Theology and the New Evangelicalism

Moreover, we need to assist our students in addressing the "Theo-logicians." Originally the creeds blazed a trail between modalism and subodinationism. Today, creeds are viewed as passing between Tritheism and Modalism. Small wonder the "New Evangelicals" can assault successfully the creeds as "Tritheistic."[16] These "New Evangelicals" [Oneness Pentecostalism as well] openly reject the doctrine of the internal relations of God, the immanent Trinity as "pagan philosophy," and present only the Economic Trinity! Jesus, as God's Son, is from Bethlehem--not eternity. "New Evangelicals" see the ancient creeds as philosophical relics, rightly deserving the criticisms of "Theo-logicians," Islam, Judaism, Jehovah's Witness, and Mormonism!

Creeds as Hermeneutical Aids

Finally, confessional Lutheranism and Walther in particular argued that creeds and confessions had an important role in biblical exegesis, concluding that we read Scripture in light of the Confessions. The Athanasian Creed tells

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[15]Tappert, AP IV, 36, 112.

[16]Steve Rudd, "Biblical Trinity Vs. Catholic Trinity," available at http://www.bible.ca/trinity/trinity-catholic-nicene.htm. See also David Bernard, *The Oneness of God* and *Essentials of Oneness Theology* (Hazelwood, Missouri: Word Aflame Press, 1985) or Thomas Weisser, *Three Persons form the Bible? Or Babylon?* (Word Aflame Press, 1983). A fine critique of "Oneness" theology is to be found in Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992). To aid our students in dealing with "oneness" theology, we could expose them to a work such as Diogenes Allen's *Philosophy for Understanding Theology,* who gives a most sympathetic treatment of Augustine and Aquinas, highlighting God's nature as grace and love. We could expose students to Luther's reflections on Trinity and Paul Althaus' suggestion that we bypass definitions of God as *actus purus*, pure actuality, God's aseity, simplicity, and define God as the "abyss of love." The Immediate effect would be that all the "essential attributes" of God would modify His essence as "Love," e.g., God is "wrathful love."

us what errors to avoid in interpretation and what to affirm! From a philosophical point of view, Edward MacKinnon suggests that the Athanasian Creed embraced a diversity of theologies, East and West, not so as to provide a synthesis but a heuristic model for doing theology, a model employing preliminary models for interpreting biblical texts, the teaching the incarnation and the Trinity.[17] John Warwick Montgomery does the same, suggesting that the Creeds are preliminary interpretative models, enabling us to include the totality of the biblical witness in interpretation. The test of the Creeds is not their internal logical consistency, but completeness and soundness in reflecting the biblical witness. Against the "Theo-logicians" John Warwick Montgomery writes this:

> The doctrine of the Trinity is not "irrational"; what is irrational is to suppress the biblical evidence for Trinity in favor of unity, or the evidence for unity in favor of Trinity. Our data must take precedence over our models – or, stating it better, our model must sensitively reflect the full range of data. A close analogy to the theologian's procedure here lies in the work of the theoretical physicist: Subatomic light entities are found, on examination, to possess wave properties [W], particle properties (P), and quantum properties [h]. Though these characteristics are in many respects incompatible (particles don't diffract, while waves do, etc.), physicists "explain" or "model" an electron as Pwh. They have to do this in order to give proper weight to all the relevant data. Likewise the theologian who speaks of God as "three in one." Neither the scientist nor the theologian expects you to get a "picture" by way of his model; the purpose of the model is to help you take into account *all* of the facts, instead of perverting reality through super imposing on it a model which leaves out some of the facts! The choice is clear: either the Trinity or a "God" who is only a pale imitation of the Lord of biblical and confessional Christianity.[18]

[17]Edward MacKinnon, *Truth and Expression* (Mahwah, N.J.: Newman Press, 1971), 156-159. MacKinnon indicates that, to date, post Wittgenstein-language analysis has avoided a genuine effort at understanding religious language. Thirty-plus years after MacKinnon's comment, analysis of scientific semantics still goes on; religious language study falters.

[18]John Montgomery, *How Do We Know There is a God? and Other Questions Inappropriate in Polite Society* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), 14-15. A like argument is present in Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Great Britain: Mentor, 1997). Bray argues that it is not Platonism that moved the church to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds but the New Testament itself.

The Bud Has Flowered: Trinitarian Theology in the New Testament

Michael Middendorf

Dr. Horace Hummel, professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, used the analogy of a bud that flowered to describe how certain doctrines were indeed present in the Old Testament but then revealed further in the New. The nature of God as triune is a classic example. There has always been one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The bud of that truth is present in the Old Testament. Reading the Old Testament through what is revealed in the New we can discern that. But it is precisely because the Old Testament bud has opened further in the New that we are able to see now what was always there. We now turn to the flowering that has been revealed in the New Testament.

The focus of this paper is on three main teachings within the New Testament that are critical to trinitarian theology. So this one paper will have three parts, yet there are not three papers, but only one paper immutable, indivisible, and, perhaps, incomprehensible! The three aspects are as follows: first, the repeated assertion of a monotheism in continuity with the Old Testament. The second part involves a recognition of the deity of Jesus Christ.[1] Part three analyzes various statements in the New Testament that speak of the three-ness of God's nature within which the Holy Spirit is also included.

To us today, these three aspects of New Testament theology may seem a given. This paper may appear to be basic review. However, at the time of the New Testament, they had an enormous theological impact. As the New Testament looked back, its authors revealed aspects of the nature of God that it asserted were wholly continuous with the Old Testament "bud." Yet they also went beyond it and, in so doing, presented challenges the church wrestled to comprehend and articulate in the centuries to follow. Indeed, the revelation of God that flowered in the New Testament pushed the church toward the formal expression of the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet the church's expressions of trinitarian theology and, particularly, its basis within the New Testament, continue to be a matter of debate. For example, Karl Barth stated the challenge for New Testament theology as follows: "The Bible does not expressly state that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are of equal essence and thus in the same sense God Himself. Nor does it expressly state that thus and

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[1]The point here is that Jesus is not divine because the Scriptures say He is, but that Jesus is divine and the Scriptures attest to that fact.

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only thus, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, God is God. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the twofold content of the Church doctrine of the Trinity."[2]

It is significant to acknowledge that simply in terms of terminology, Barth has a point. Words like "trinity" and "homoousias" are not part of the text of the New Testament. One wonders what the Apostle Paul would have thought about such terms in A. D. 60. How would St. John have responded in A. D. 90 if asked whether he accepted the statement from the Athanasian Creed "that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance"? Apart from further discussion and explanation, the response of both inspired authors may well have been something of a blank stare. The more critical issue is this: Does what the New Testament expresses legitimately lead to the church's orthodox trinitarian formulations? We will return to that question at the conclusion of this paper.

Part 1: First, Christianity was careful to avoid the charge of advocating something other than the monotheism of the Old Testament. As Stauffer puts it, "Early Christian monotheism is confirmed rather than shattered by the Christology of the N[ew] T[estament]."[3] In Mark 10 Jesus challenges the young man who gave Him the title Διδάσκαλε ἀγαθε, with the response: Τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός (Mark 10:18).[4] Jesus' affirmation of the *Shema* of Deut. 6:4 seems evident here.[5] However, it is direct in Mark 12:29 when Jesus refers to that text just before identifying the foremost commandment of all: Ἄκουε, Ἰσραήλ, κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστιν[6] [Deut. 6:4 may not have originally been a direct statement of

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[2]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, bk. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd edition, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 381. Emil Brunner similarly asserts, "The idea of the 'Triune God' does not form part of the witness and message of Primitive Christianity" (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950], 217).

[3]Ethelbert Stauffer, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. G. Friedrich and G. Kittel, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1973), s.v. "θεός" 3:102 [Hereafter abbreviated as *TDNT*.]; see also Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1:351ff.

[4]Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. "θεός" 3:102.

[5]Deut. 6:4 in Hebrew and from the Septuagint reads as follows: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃ Ἄκουε Ισραηλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστιν

[6]Parallels are Matt. 23:37; Luke 10:27.

monotheism or of Yahweh's one-ness.[7] However, the assertion that there is, in fact, only "one God" is at least implied here[8] and made explicit elsewhere (cf. Deut. 4:35; Isa. 45:6). Even if the *Shema* was simply Israel's confession of allegiance to Yahweh alone,[9] to acknowledge and, indeed, worship both God the Father and also Jesus as Lord (e.g., Matt. 2:11; 28:17; Phil. 2:10-11) would certainly appear to violate that statement.]

Matt. 23:8-9 is an intriguing text particularly for those of us who are called "teachers." Jesus rebukes the love of privilege, recognition, and self-glorification that motivated the Scribes and Pharisees. He then mandates this contrast among His disciples: ὑμεῖς δὲ μὴ κληθῆτε, Ῥαββί· εἷς γάρ ἐστιν ὑμῶν ὁ διδάσκαλος, πάντες δὲ ὑμεῖς ἀδελφοί ἐστε. καὶ πατέρα μὴ καλέσητε ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, εἷς γάρ ἐστιν ὑμῶν ὁ πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος. As the following verse makes clear, Jesus alone is the "one" teacher and our ultimate father is our heavenly "one."

Paul clearly reaffirms monotheism as well. After his most concise articulation of the doctrine of justification by faith in Rom. 3:28, Paul buttresses that assertion in the following verses: ἢ Ἰουδαίων ὁ θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν; ναὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν, εἴπερ εἷς ὁ θεὸς ὃς δικαιώσει περιτομὴν ἐκ πίστεως καὶ ἀκροβυστίαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως (28-29). The one-ness of God supports the teaching that Jews and Gentiles are justified before Him in the same manner.[10] In Galatians 3, the Torah was mediated through a plurality of angels, ὁ δὲ θεὸς εἷς ἐστιν (3:19-20).

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[7]The exact force of Deut. 6:4 is debated. See Quell, in *TDNT*, s.v. κύριος, 3:1079-81. Quell concludes, "It is not possible to determine the content of the words with a logical precision free from all possible objection" (1081). It is probably neither simply a statement about Yahweh's oneness nor is it a statement of classic monotheism. More likely it is a confession that Israel worships only one God. This is called "practical monotheism" by Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 100-101.

[8]Horace Hummel similarly concludes: "While grammatically no airtight case can be made for monotheistic doctrine on its basis (as is also true of the First Commandment), functionally the statement certainly has that import" (*The Word Becoming Flesh* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1979], 93).

[9]As Quell, who concludes the force is, "Yahweh is our God, Yahweh as the only one." He adds, "Deut. 6:4 does not seem to have had any influence on the ancient Christian formula εἷς ὁ θεὸς" (*TDNT*, s.v. κύριος, 3:1081). But see the discussion of passages here, as well as 1 Cor. 8 and Eph. 4 below.

[10]Some try to make a distinction between ἐκ and διὰ, in this passage. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, eds. J. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1:222, who concludes that such attempts "are unconvincing."

The next three Pauline texts have more complicated implications for the second section of this paper, but their meaning in regard to monotheism is clear. 1 Cor. 8 announces that an idol is nothing in the world ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς. There are many who are being called "gods" and "lords," ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν. In a whole string of "ones," Eph. 4:6 includes: εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν. 1 Tim. 2:5 declares, εἷς γὰρ θεός.

One relevant non-Pauline text is James 2:19. It challenges: σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσουσιν. Here, above all, there is continuity with the Old Testament. Monotheism is unequivocally maintained. Unless one accepts the charge of contradictory voices and glaring inconsistencies within the New Testament, the suggestion that it openly or consciously abandons monotheism is to be rejected.[11] The New Testament consistently asserts that there is "one God." In current discussions with Judaism (and Islam as well), the dominant note of monotheism voiced by the New Testament ought to be firmly upheld.

Part 2: Even in the face of this open and consistent reassertion of monotheism, the New Testament also pushes us toward what Peter Toon calls a "Mutation in Monotheism."[12] This is seen, first and foremost, in the New Testament's confession of the divinity of Jesus. Apart from this assertion of Jesus' divinity, one wonders how, when, or even if the church's confession of the Trinity would have been struggled over, formulated or even deemed necessary.[13] The matter here, of course, has been debated and disputed in volumes of theological discussion. For example, Emil Brunner states, "It was never the intention of the original witnesses to Christ in the New Testament to set before us an intellectual problem—that of the Three Divine

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[11]Islam claims Christianity rejects monotheism. For example, *The Holy Quran*, 2nd edition states: "O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and his word, which he bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from him: so believe in God and his apostles. Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to him: (far exalted is he) above having a son. To him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs" (trans. and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali [Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977], Sura 4:171, 233-234).

[12]Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996); this is the title of ch. 6, 113-130.

[13]See, for example, Walter Bowie, *Jesus and the Trinity*, "The title [of this book] . . . embodies an emphasis which must not be forgotten. *Trinity* was not the first word, but the last one; the first was *Jesus*" (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960, 72). Barth similarly states: "The doctrine of the Trinity is simply a development of the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ or the Lord" (*Church Dogmatics* I, 1:334).

Persons—and then to tell us silently to worship this mystery of the 'Three in One.' There is no trace of such an idea in the New Testament."[14]

The dominant contemporary "consensus" for rejecting the divinity of Jesus is the Butlmannian separation between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died a simple man's life; later, either under persecution or from a position of power when Christianity became one of the dominant religions of the empire, Jesus was gradually turned into a divine being.[15]

However, the divine nature of Jesus is expressed a number of ways within the texts of the New Testament itself. First, a few passages appear to assert Jesus' divinity directly. Rom. 9:5 is speaking of the Israelites ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν. Here the punctuation is a problem.[16] Is there to be a hard break after σάρκα followed by a doxology to God who is blessed? Or, as John Murray forcefully argues, is the latter phrase also in reference to ὁ Χριστὸς who is, in fact, "the one being God over all"?[17] In Titus 2:13 Paul describes believers as προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The question here is the referent of τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ. It may refer to God the Father (cf. 2 Thess. 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:1), but it may also identify Jesus as "the majestic God."[18] Heb. 1:8 applies words from Ps. 45:6 to Jesus: "And to the Son [He said], "Your Throne, O God, is for ever and ever.'"

John's Gospel begins, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. The significance of the lack of the definite article with the final θεός has been disputed through the centuries, but seems to have been resolved as a grammatical issue.[19] As a result ὁ λόγος was God in the fullest sense in the beginning and then became flesh (v. 14). Later in chapter one, verse 18 refers to Jesus as μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς.

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[14]Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 226.

[15]On the popular front, this is the conclusion of recent Frontline video on PBS whose title says it all, "From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians" (a Frontline coproduction with Invision Productions, Ltd.; c. 1988 by WGBH Educational Foundation).

[16]For more details, see Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. "θεός" 3:105.

[17]John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 245-248.

[18]See J. Schneider in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols., ed. C. Brown [*DNTT*] (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference House, 1976), s.v. "God," 2:82.

[19]The conclusive study is E. C. Collwell, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53 (1933): 12-21; see the discussion in *DNTT*, 2:80-81.

While some texts omit θεὸς, the earliest ones support its inclusion.[20] After the resurrection, Thomas clearly identifies Jesus as ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (20:29).

If these statements are not sufficient, the point about Jesus' divinity can be discerned in a number of other more indirect or subtle ways. Secondly, it is also implied in statements about the person and activity of Jesus. Jesus was present "in the beginning" (John 1:1,14; 17:5; 1 John 1:1-2). The pre-existence of Christ by itself implies His "divine nature, divine origin, and divine power."[21] Phil. 2 further asserts that Jesus was ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ (v. 6). Exactly what this means is explained later in the verse as τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ. In Him πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος dwells in bodily form (Col. 2:9). He is not creature, but, rather, took part in creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; 1 Cor. 8:6).

For Jesus, God is "my Father" and the Father sends Jesus with His authority (John 5:22,27; 7:28-29; 8:18,26; etc.). Jesus reveals the Father to us (John 1:18); He speaks from the Father (John 9:4) and shares the Father's glory (John 17:5). He exhibits the divine authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7), does miraculous works (e.g., Luke 7:16; John 3:2; 9:32-33), and now sits on God's throne to judge the world (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). While Jesus is separate from the Father, He is also in some sense "in" and "one" with the Father (John 10:30; 14:10; 17:11,21). Indeed, those who see Jesus have in fact seen the Father (John 12:45; 14:9). All this leads Stauffer to conclude that Jesus "is *the* representative of God in the world and in history. For He is instituted and equipped by God the Father. He is Himself the Bearer of the divine office."[22] As a result, hymns are sung to Jesus (e.g., Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11). His people call upon His Name (e.g., Acts 9:14,21; 22:19) and address prayers to Him (Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Cor. 12:8).[23]

Third, the titles used by and given to Jesus also identify Him as divine. Some of these are less direct. He is ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (Mark 1:24; John 6:69), ὁ εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου (Col. 1:15; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), ὁ υἱός τοῦ θεοῦ (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:13, etc.) and so forth. In and of themselves these titles do not necessarily assert divinity. However, the manner in which the titles are filled out expresses more than mere election or functionality.[24] For

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[20]For example, *p66* and *p75*; see Bruce Metzger, ed., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 198.

[21]Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 17.

[22]E. Stauffer in *TDNT*, s.v. "θεός" 3:106.

[23]Toon, *Our Triune God*, 118-120.

[24]As could be surmised from Stauffer's quote just cited; page 8, n. 22.

example, He is not merely one of "God's sons," but His "only/unique" Son (μονογενὴς in John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9; cf. Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 8:3, 32).

As a whole, these titles give Jesus divine attributes or characteristics, and then also relate Jesus to God in some manner, normally with the genitive to follow. They convey the idea that Jesus is in some way on the same level as the Father, yet also differentiated from Him.[25] Indeed, the very terms "Father" and "Son" imply some type of subordinate relationship between the two as 1 Cor. 15:28 makes clear.[26] This can be viewed in terms of role or function rather than essence. But, in any case, the explicit nature of the relationship is not fully worked out within the New Testament.

More to the point, two of these titles make assertions which are much more direct. Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμί strikingly identifies Himself with that which "is the self-declaration of God in the O[ld] T[estament]."[27] ἐγώ εἰμί statements do occur at significant junctures in the Synoptics. At Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, His answer to the question, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" begins, "ἐγώ εἰμι" (Mark 14:62; see also Mark 6:50).

However, Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμί is particularly prominent in John's Gospel. Here ἐγώ εἰμί often takes a predicate (ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς, 6:68; τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, 8:12; ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, 10:11; etc.). Yet in a number of cases the pronouncements have no predicate and, as a result, are even more forceful. The following are three examples from John 8:

> ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ πιστεύσητε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι, ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν (v. 24).
>
> Ὅταν ὑψώσητε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τότε γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι (v. 28).
>
> πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί (v. 58).

A number of related statements are also made in Revelation. In 1:8 the Lord God declares, Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ; in 1:17 the Son of Man says, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος. In Rev. 21:6 God says, ἐγώ [εἰμι] τὸ

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[25]Colin Brown, Schneider, *DNTT*, 2:84, states, "In all these statements the two facts, that God and Christ belong together and that they are distinct, are equally stressed, with the precedence in every case due to God the Father, who stand above Christ."

[26]ὅταν δὲ ὑποταγῇ αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, τότε [καὶ] αὐτὸς ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται τῷ ὑποτάξαντι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, ἵνα ᾖ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.

[27]Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. "θεός" 3:104; see also Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. ἐγώ, 2:348-54. In addition to the obvious connection with the revelation of the divine Name in Exod. 3:14, one should also note other "I am" assertions based upon that Name within the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 48:12).

Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος. Only a few short verses later, Jesus Himself declares, ἐγὼ τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (22:13). The implication seems clear enough.

Just as significant is the identification of Jesus as κύριος (e.g., Acts 2:36; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). The assertion that "Jesus is Lord" was the earliest Christian confession.[28] In our day, this all too often comes off as a legalistic and demanding assertion of Jesus' dominance and power (e.g., "Jesus must be Lord of your life!"). However, the significance goes far beyond the dominical title to the very name of God. The key is not merely the Septuagint's use of κύριος to translate Yahweh over 6,000 times,[29] but also the textual basis from within the Old Testament upon which the New Testament confession is made.[30]

The most prominent of these is Phil. 2:5-11. After the humiliation of Jesus' death, even on a cross, the climax of His exaltation is expressed in verses 10-11: ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός. The background here is Isa. 45 where the Septuagint translates Yahweh as saying of Himself, ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ ἐξομολογήσεται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τῷ θεῷ (v. 23b; cf. v. 21).[31]

Both Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13 quote Joel 3:5 from the Septuagint, which reads: καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσηται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται.[32] Here, as usual, κύριος translates Yahweh. Within the immediate context of the quotation from Joel, both New Testament chapters explicitly identify Jesus as κύριος.

> καὶ κύριον αὐτὸν καὶ Χριστὸν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός, τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν (Acts 2:39)
>
> ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν (Rom. 10:9)

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[28]J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Essex: Longman, 1972), 14-15.

[29]Quell, in *TDNT*, s.v. "κύριος" 3:1059 notes that the Septuagint renders Yahweh with κύριος 6,156 times. It is only rarely used for *el* (23 times) or *elohim* (193 times) Quell, 3:1059. The direct connection with Jesus is disputed, but note the argument here in response.

[30]Here I am indebted to Charles B. Cousar for emphasizing the Old Testament basis in a paper on "Christology and Monotheism in Paul" presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Toronto, Canada, November, 2002.

[31]:כִּי־לִי תִכְרַע כָּל־בֶּרֶךְ תִּשָּׁבַע כָּל־לָשׁוֹן

[32]2:32 in English; 3:5 in the Masoretic text reads: וְהָיָה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה יִמָּלֵט

The *Shema* of Deut. 6:4 underlies 1 Cor. 8:6 which states: ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ. It is significant that the identification of θεὸς as our "one" Father and Creator is immediately followed by the assertion that Jesus is κύριος and that He is similarly the "one" through whom all things exist. [This passage suggests that Eph. 4:5-6 should be interpreted in like fashion: εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἓν βάπτισμα, εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν. The one κύριος is to be identified as Jesus; at the same time God is also still one (see also 1 Cor. 12 discussed below).]

Jesus' decisive question remains, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Together all these passages make the identification of Jesus with Yahweh, the I AM, all but inescapable. Thus the confession κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς serves primarily as a statement of His divinity. Jesus is God.

These texts also bring us to a decisive point. In line with Deut. 6:4, the New Testament affirms that the Lord God is one. God is our one Father. However, apart from quotations from the Old Testament, "κύριος was not a very common term for God" in the New Testament.[33] κύριος normally refers to the "Lord" Jesus who is distinguished from God the "Abba" Father (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; etc.). Significantly, then, there is also one Lord (Yahweh) whom the New Testament now identifies as Jesus. As a result, the one-ness of God is maintained and the divine nature of Jesus is also clearly stated and implied. As long as these two seemingly paradoxical truths are asserted, the way has been paved toward discerning a trinitarian theology in the New Testament and into the final section of this paper.

Part 3: In a number of places the New Testament articulates what came to be understood as expressions of the three persons of the Trinity. At times this occurs in formulaic expressions. Matt. 28:19 states: πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.[34] 2 Cor. 13:13 is another example. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

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[33]Foerster, in *TDNT*, s.v. "κύριος" 3:1087; he observes that in "the Marcan material and Q, God is never called ο κύριος except in Mark 5:19." Other exceptions include Matt. 11:25 (Luke 10:21);1 Tim. 6:15; see also Fortman, *The Triune God*, 19.

[34]It is interesting that this is the only text with a trinitarian formula attached to baptism. Note the many references to baptism into the Name of Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus, etc. (e.g., Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5).

More often, the description seems less "deliberate." Instead it occurs regularly and almost inevitably as the New Testament aims to describe God's saving work in all its fulness.[35] The voice from heaven together with the dove descending upon Jesus at His baptism is commonly identified in this way (Mark 1:9-11). On Pentecost day, Peter describes what is happening in these words about Jesus: τῇ δεξιᾷ οὖν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψωθείς, τήν τε ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου λαβὼν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός, ἐξέχεεν τοῦτο ὃ ὑμεῖς [καὶ] βλέπετε καὶ ἀκούετε (Acts 2:33). Gal. 4:6 is another example. Ὅτι δέ ἐστε υἱοί, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν κρᾶζον, Αββα ὁ πατήρ. 1 Cor. 12:3 affirmed the identity of Jesus as κύριος. Verses 4-6 state: Διαιρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσίν, τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα· καὶ διαιρέσεις διακονιῶν εἰσιν, καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος· καὶ διαιρέσεις ἐνεργημάτων εἰσίν, ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς θεὸς ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.

Perhaps the most surprising thing here is the inclusion of the Spirit in descriptions of God along with Father and Son. Though not as often as with Jesus, a few passages do appear to identify the Holy Spirit as God directly. For example, 2 Cor. 3:17 states, ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν· οὗ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, ἐλευθερία.[36] Other times the Holy Spirit is used interchangeably with references to God (e.g., Acts 5:3-4). More often, however, the situation is similar to the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus. The Spirit's personal nature and divine activity are simply described and confessed. Fortman summarizes:

> The fullest presentation of the Holy Spirit is found in the Paraclete passages [of John's Gospel]. . . . He is "another Paraclete" (14:16), the "Spirit of truth" (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), who "dwells with" the Apostles, "whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him" (14:17). He is sent by the Father and by Jesus (14:26; 15:26), and proceeds from the Father (15:27). "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (14:26). "He will bear witness to me" (15:26). "He will guide you into all truth . . . and will declare to you the things that are to come" (16:13). "He will glorify

[35]In addition to those noted here, see also Rom. 5:1-5; 8:14-17; 14:17-18; 15:16,30; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 3:3; Gal. 3:11-14; Eph. 1:11-14,17; 2:18; Col. 1:3-8; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:1-2. This is often referred to as an "economic" expression of the Trinity, by Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1:333, for example. This kind of expression is present repeatedly, but do the Scripture's assert more? Barth replies negatively in regard to expressions which go beyond this to God's "essence" or "immanence"; see Barth, "None of this is directly biblical, i.e., explicitly stated in the Bible; it is Church doctrine."

[36]John 4:24 has also been suggested: πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν. It seems less likely that this is a direct reference to the Holy Spirit.

me, for he will take from what is mine and declare it to you" (16:14). "He will be with you forever" (14:16).[37]

The relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is similar to the "Father/Son" relationship noted above. As Toon states, "The Paraclete is to Christ as Christ is to the Father."[38] On the one hand, the two are intimately related. For example, "By Jesus Christ we receive the adoption as sons, yet the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption (Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15). We are justified in the Spirit and in the Lord (1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 2;17), sanctified in the Spirit and in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11)."[39] As a result, it is not surprising when Acts refers to "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7) and Paul speaks of "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9).[40] At the same time, however, the Holy Spirit is distinguished from Jesus. It is the Spirit who intercedes for us in prayer (Rom. 8:26), assures us that we are God's children (Rom. 8:16,23), fills us with wisdom (1 Cor. 2:11,14), and strengthens us in our inner being (Eph. 3:16). All of this legitimately leads Fortman to conclude that in the New Testament, the divine Spirit "is a person distinct from the Father and the Son."[41]

Conclusion

In conclusion, what can we say about the relationship between the New Testament and the trinitarian theology of the church? Brunner concludes, "The ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity is not only the product of genuine Biblical thought, it is also the product of philosophical speculation, which is remote from the thought of the Bible. . . . Similarly, the idea of the Three Persons is more than questionable."[42] So is there a trinitarian theology in the New Testament or not? I believe that the three points emphasized in this paper lead to the conclusion that there is. The New Testament affirms that (1) there is only one true God, (2) Jesus Christ, along with the Father, is divine Lord and God, and (3) it portrays God as three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, acting "for us and for our salvation."

A more complicated challenge is the suggestion that the New Testament provides only the foundation upon which the church later built a trinitarian theology. Schneider illustrates that view by stating: "All this underlines the

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[37]Fortman, *The Triune God*, 28.

[38]Toon, *Our Triune God*, 184; citing passages from John's Gospel, he notes, 184-85, that both Jesus and the Spirit are sent from the Father, are called holy, teach, reveal, convince and convict.

[39]Fortman, *The Triune God*, 20.

[40]Toon, *Our Triune God*, 190, even speaks of a "merging" of the two.

[41]Fortman, *The Triune God*, 28.

[42]Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 239.

point that primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds of the early church"[43] Fortman similarly concludes that the New Testament merely provides "a trinitarian schema or ground plan."[44] Bowie states that the doctrine of the Trinity is not "already formulated" in the New Testament, but developed as "the progressive charting of a course like the course of a ship."[45] Barth says that only the "root" which subsequently grew into trinitarian doctrine is present in the New Testament.[46] Brunner asserts that the church later "created the doctrine of the Trinity."[47] What is a proper response?

In *One God in Trinity*, Christopher Kaiser writes an article titled "The Discernment of Triunity."[48] This is perhaps an adequate way of addressing the issue. To return to the bud and flower analogy, one might ask, "Has the church's articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity been a further flowering that developed subsequent to the New Testament? Does the doctrine of the Trinity go beyond the witness of Scripture?" In response, I would agree with Toon's assessment, which states: "I do not believe that there is a precise or formal doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament materials. At the same time, I do think that the whole of the New Testament bears witness—mostly implicitly but sometimes explicitly—to the plurality within unity of the one true God, *Yahweh Elohim*."[49]

What we can we say is that in the New Testament the flower has opened as far as God's nature has now been revealed to us.[50] In formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, the church did not to go beyond or add to what the New Testament said. Rather, it simply described the flower as far as it had already blossomed in Scripture. In that sense the doctrine does not add to what was revealed.[51] Rather, the church simply practiced discernment in regard to

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[43]J. Schneider in *DNTT*, s.v. "God," 2:84.

[44]Fortman, *The Triune God*, 32.

[45]Bowie, *Jesus and the Trinity*, 72; he adds, "The expression they developed had to find its way through trial and error; and the test for them as between truth and error was not a doctrine already formulated but. . . ."

[46]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1:346, 375, etc.

[47]Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 222.

[48]Christopher Kaiser, "The Discernment of Triunity" in *One God in Trinity*, ed. P. Toon and J. Spiceland (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 27-41.

[49]Toon, *Our Triune God*, 67.

[50]More of God's nature, as well as many other things, will be revealed and opened further to us on the day we see God face to face. Now, we still see many things in a mirror dimly (1 John; 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:12).

[51]Perhaps Brunner is asserting something like this in these words: "This then is the biblical evidence—not for the Trinity, but evidence which points in the direction of the doctrine of the Trinity" (*Christian Doctrine of God*, 217).

explaining and carefully articulating what was already fully there in the text of the New Testament. A clear answer to this question is the challenge with which we are to wrestle as these papers continue our progression toward "Confessing the Trinity Today."[52]

[52]Quotation from the conclusion of Athanasian Creed.

The Challenge of Confessing and Teaching the Trinitarian Faith in the Context of Religious Pluralism

A. R. Victor Raj

Michael O. was raised in Kenya during his formative years. Growing up in that part of Africa, Michael had little hands-on encounter with the Christian faith. He knew that Christians were followers of Jesus Christ, and they worshiped on Sundays in a church. Michael graduated from college and held a job with the department of education in his home state. On his way to and from work he would regularly walk past Christian churches; and in the community and in his place of work he would have the opportunity to interact with Christian friends and neighbors. One Sunday morning, on his own, Michael boldly stepped into a church and sat through the worship service. He stayed on and attended the adult Bible class as well. There was enough in this new religion that fascinated Michael. He took adult instruction lessons and was baptized and confirmed in the Christian faith.

To be sure, the Christian education Michael received from the pastor helped him answer many questions he had about the new faith. Yet, questions concerning the Trinity of the Christian religion kept lurking in his mind, for most of which no one ever provided a satisfactory answer. "How can God be One, in three persons, and yet not three gods?" Besides, "How could Christians begin and end their worship in the Name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and still claim that they are not worshiping three different gods?" Disturbing as they were, these questions, nevertheless, did not deter Michael from joining the church and believing what the church was teaching. All religions have within them their own mystery, Michael surmised, and mysteries are believed rather than interpreted, he reasoned. He would sing with Christendom, and with no uncompromising assurance, "Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, three we name you, Though in essence only one; Undivided God we claim you And, adoring, bend the knee While we own the mystery."[1] Michael would later study at a seminary and become a minister in the church. Soon it would be his turn to help other new Christians who would be wrestling with questions such as the ones he had, while he was still exploring the chemistry of the Christian Trinity.

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[1] *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), #171, stanza 5.

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Some twenty-five years ago in my hometown in Trivandrum, South India, I went shopping for an Ashoka brand name razor blade. The shop I stopped by did not carry the brand I wanted; instead, the shopkeeper offered me the Aloka brand. Aloka surely was Ashoka's look-alike, in form and in shape including its orange-white-and-green, tri-color jacket. But I wanted Ashoka, not Aloka, I insisted, to which the shop owner responded, "Both are the same, sir." I said, "No, they may be *similar,* but they definitely are not the *same!*"[2]

My task in this essay is not so much to explain what actually constitutes the Trinity in Christian theology, but to engage the challenges of confessing and teaching the trinitarian faith in the context of religious pluralism. I will begin with an appraisal of what the very sounding of the Christian trinitarian dogma communicates to those *outside* the christocentric trinitarian monotheistic faith, particularly as we find them all around us in a pluri-cultural and poly-religious world, and explore some possibilities of addressing that challenge with a view to witnessing the Christian Gospel in such contexts.[3] This paper will more reflect some of these challenges than it will propose ways to confront them.

For the present purposes I will proceed with a working definition that "theology" is the truth about God, and "confessing" is proclaiming a theological truth as witness or testimony.[4] In this vein, a Christian theologian engages the task of proclaiming and affirming the theological truth of the Trinity as witness to those outside the Christian faith, underscoring that his task is to present to his new audience in the least complicated and most understandable way the weightier matters of faith, such as the Trinity, never making matters of faith either simplistic or unduly sophisticated. Arguably, a teacher and confessor of faith may be certain and confident of what he confesses and sets out to teach. But that does not mean that his audience hears

[2]As is well known, in recent years several words and phrases, especially from the English language, have become commonplace in other languages and easily understood without interpretation in other cultures. For example, in most cultures English words like "blade," "paper," "bulb," "car," "bus," etc., are understood without translations in ordinary conversation. In many instances, people have preferred the English original to their equivalents in the mother tongue for common usage.

[3]I owe the phrase "christocentric trinitarian monotheistic" to Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel! Christianity Among the World's Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 28. In the context of Christianity encountering the world's religions, Braaten says "Christian faith is like language: you either learn to speak Christianese or you don't, and no rational natural theology about God and religion will help you do it" (19).

[4]Commenting on the purpose of Christian theology, Robert Kolb writes, "Theology exists as a discipline in order to interpret God's word in the Scripture for the changing human scene. . . . For the theological task demands listening to voices from every field of human endeavor in order to bring God's Word to all the corners of His world" (*Speaking the Gospel Today,* 2nd edition [St. Louis: Concordia, 1994], 8).

and understands what he says exactly in the way he has intended his message to be understood. In other words, while communicating the faith, the burden of imprinting upon the hearts and minds of the listeners what is being taught and confessed in its truth and totality rests heavily on the speaker rather than on the listener. What is confessed must therefore become clear and meaningful to those among whom it is confessed so that those who are being taught may become as competent as their teacher in what is being taught. As a result, the receptor will have imprinted in his heart and mind the *same* message that proceeded from the confessor's heart and mind, and not just a *similar* message.

What does *what* we confess mean for those among *whom* we confess? It is the design of the Triune God that He chose to communicate with His people particularly by way of speaking and writing. Oral communication is a distinguishing characteristic of the God whom Christians believe in, teach, and confess. The God of Christians speaks as He creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Verbalizing a message involves language. Words in any language are formed in specific contexts, and their meaning is best understood with reference to the context in which they are formed and used. And, "meaning is the cornerstone of any linguistic system and of any communicative act."[5] Communicating the faith entails discourse. In order for discourse to accomplish its desired end, the speaker (narrator) selects (and utters) words in a certain sequence with the intent that such utterances impart to the hearer the specific meaning (message) the speaker has assumed or attached to the words he has selected and utilized. Meanings of words are, as it were, a two-edged sword. Meaning signifies that which is intended by the speaker, as well as what is conveyed to the listener in a given context. [6]

When making a speech, the burden is on the speaker to make clear what he speaks the best way he can to his audience. The speaker may mean well when he makes the speech intently and intelligently; however, that does not mean that the listener understands the speech the way the speaker had intended it. This is true even in situations where both the speaker and the listener have inherited a common linguistic background and share a common worldview.

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[5]James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean,* 2nd edition (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), 120.

[6]Voelz points out that the meaning of a word cannot be derived from an historical investigation of its earlier usage, and therefore language must be studied *synchronically* (at a cross section in time) not *diachronically* (developmentally through time). Therefore "when we communicate, we talk/write about persons, places, things, ideas, etc. (= referents), and we characterize them in certain ways; that is, we ascribe to them the features of the thoughts (= conceptual signifieds) which they brought to our mind and which now, in turn, the words (= signifiers) of our communication are to bring to the minds of those who receive them." See Voelz, *What Does This Mean,* Chapter 4, particularly, the diagram on Communications Model on 95.

Needless to say, insurmountable difficulties in communication arise in this connection if the speaker and the listener embrace completely different perspectives and associate completely different meanings with the same word.

The heart speaks when faith is confessed. Communicating the faith entails the impartation of faith from one heart (of the speaker) to another heart (of the listener). When the heart speaks, the inner being of the person, that is, his conscience, speaks. In this sense confessing the faith is transmitting what one person has embraced in his conscience to the conscience of another. And conscience speaks the mother tongue.[7]

The doctrine of the Trinity is the heart and core of the Christian faith. It is an expression of faith that flows from the heart of every Christian believer, one that encapsulates in one simple but pregnant word the one God in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Every Christian believes in his heart and confesses with his lips this mystery. To be sure, the word Trinity had been in the making for almost three centuries before it became a commonplace usage in the Christian church, although the faith it signifies has been believed, taught, and confessed through the ages wherever and whenever the Gospel has been proclaimed, throughout the world.[8] Thus, each individual Christian of any age, any place, and any culture who confesses this faith does so with the entire Christendom synchronically.

Christians teach and confess the Trinity, even in this age of pluralism, for the purpose of communicating the Gospel of salvation God brought about for the whole world uniquely in His Son Jesus Christ, witnessed by the Spirit. For

[7]I owe the phrase "*Das Gewissen spricht die Muttersprache*" to Dr. Won Yong Ji, professor emeritus of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. Dr. Ji is a first generation Korean immigrant to the United States, and the statement in German is a Ji original. I had doubted with him if this dictum might not be going back to either Freitag or Heidegger. Ji said that while that may be true in part (conceptually speaking), the line as it reads above is of Ji's own coinage, one along with eleven others like it he cherishes as his own legacy. He further explained that language is relational, and even if others in previous generations may have said the same thing, it can still be considered a Ji original. After all, universal truths such as the above cannot just belong to one person or one generation. There is no way of knowing if others before Heidegger may have said the same thing.

[8]In his book on *Revelation, History, and the Dialogue of World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), David Carpenter compares the writings of the fifth century (A. D. 450–500) Hindu Vedic philosopher Bhartrhari with those of St. Bonaventure. According to Carpenter, for Bonaventure the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of God and the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity is "the mystery of life itself." He further writes, "the entire universe, together with its history, is conceived as a revelation of the Trinity, and this revelation, in all its breadth and variety, is grounded in the three Persons of the Trinity" (92).

it is God's desire that all people must be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The Trinity we confess is not as Father alone, Son alone, and Holy Spirit alone, but one God alone, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The uniqueness of the Christian understanding of the trinitarian God hinges on the fact that the transcendent God becomes immanent to humans through His actions. Thus the mystery of the trinitarian God unfolds in His manifold actions as He creates, redeems, and calls people to faith and keeps them in the faith. The very God who gives all men breath and life and everything else redeems His fallen creature from sin and its consequences and recreates him for a new life. The God who creates everything by His word (speech) also chooses to put on human flesh (incarnate) in order to redeem a fallen world. And He sends His Spirit to call everyone unto Himself by faith.

Teaching and confessing trinitarian faith in an age of pluralism, and in the context of the plurality of world religions is perhaps the greatest scandal of the Christian religion. If on the one hand, the religion of Islam hinges on Allah's transcendence, on the other hand, a religion like Hinduism emphasizes both the transcendence and the immanence of its deity by interpreting it as both transcendent and immanent. The Hindu deity is the ultimate reality, the wholly other, and the unfathomable mystery without shape or form. Brahman in the absolute is not so much a person but an IT, and therefore non-personal. At the same time, IT manifests in a myriad ways including in human, animal, and inanimate forms.

As an inclusive religion, meant for all people at their different levels of knowledge, assent, and faith in God, Hinduism has argued the meaning of worshiping 330 million gods (and goddesses) and, at the same time, converging these gods, humanity, and the rest of the universe into one cosmic, monistic whole. As the Indian philosopher and statesman Sarvepalli Radhakrishan observed, it would be unfair to take the toys away from the children. Children learn ideas and values by playing with toys. Philosophical Hinduism proposes that as people mature in their thinking they may be able to ponder the mysteries of life and the abstract nature of God without external means. The plurality of persons and the fragmented understanding of the ultimate will diminish as the human mind grows and matures into the full awareness and comprehension of the absolute, supreme consciousness (silence) or abstractness (pure science) of the ultimate reality.

In sharp contradistinction to the Christian way of the fallen human race being brought to an unending fellowship with a personal God by God's own initiative, Hinduism, at best, proposes the merging of the individual soul (self) into the eternal (cosmic) soul. In the end, fusion with the ultimate, and not fellowship with God, is what Hinduism offers.

Hinduism has been described as a "welter of beliefs," and as such it

> includes practically every type of religious dogma that may be met with [in] the numerous religious traditions of the world; likewise, on the practical side it has tolerated, if not encouraged, practically every form of propitiation and worship of God and gods, and almost every style of meditation and spiritual discipline, from fetish-worship to *yoga* or mystic contemplation that may have prevailed in any age of man's history, and in any part of this planet.[9]

Perhaps "welter" is also a fitting adjective that encapsulates the amorphous nature of the Hindu understanding of God. In its long history of interpreting the ultimate and its relationship with the created order, Hinduism has employed phrases such as dualism, non-dualism, monism, and qualified non-dualism.[10] There are three kinds of reality within the Ultimate Reality, that is, god, soul, and matter. According to this way of thinking, Brahman carries a plurality within itself. This plurality allows room for building relationships. Followers of the Hindu way find their way to connect with the Ultimate through excelling in their knowledge, good works, and devotion to the deities.

Confessing and teaching the Trinity must serve a soteriological function, as the trinitarian God desires the salvation of all human creatures and their coming to the knowledge of the Truth. As the vast majority of the world's religions do not either understand or interpret salvation the way Christianity does, it is practically impossible to establish a common ground among religions in matters of salvation when Christians enter into dialogue with people of other faiths. Nevertheless, many Christians who are directly involved in the pluralism project recognize that "salvation has a distinctively Christian content: transformation in Christ with a view to ultimate communion with the triune God. Even where other religious communities employ the term 'salvation,' their conceptions of the aim of life differ from one another and from that espoused by Christian communities."[11]

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[9]N. K. Devaraja, *Hinduism and the Modern Age* (Bombay: Current Book House, 1975), ix.

[10]These are but a few of the philosophical constructs Hindu thinkers, particularly the Vedanta philosophers since the seventh century A. D., have developed in order to deal with the relationship between the seen and the unseen. Underlying all these interpretations is the claim that the empirical world is a "phenomenal" world, never existing, never non-existing! If this way of thinking alludes to the passing nature of everything, it also affirms the eternity of everything. Both atoms and souls are indestructible.

[11]J. A. DiNoia, "Christian Universalism: The Nonexclusive Particularity of Salvation in Christ," in *Either/Or: The Gospel or Neopaganism*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 39. DiNoia further observes that pluralists make salvation an all-encompassing designation for the variety of aims that religious traditions espouse and commend.

Ominously, some of the most popular verbiage in inter-faith dialogue, such as inclusivism and pluralism, is the creation primarily of the late twentieth-century Christian theological enterprise as Christian theologians themselves have initiated such projects.[12] Nevertheless, trinitarian Christians enter such conversation with the ultimate goal of publicly confessing the salvific significance of the person and work of the One God in three persons, but not three gods. Hinduism in its philosophical form may be abstract, but Hindus for all practical purposes are spiritual people, craving to build a "saving" relationship with the ultimate, which they call "God."[13] Hinduism may be polytheistic, but Hindus can also relate to One God who creates, sustains, and preserves them. This "unknown god" may be a point of contact with which trinitarian Christians might find their way into the Hindu mind in order to bring to them the saving message of the trinitarian God. A pluralism project that does not project the one and unique salvific act of God in Christ for all human creatures might as well be called a "polytheism" project, because it also allows different definitions for God and for salvation.[14]

The religion of Islam does emphasize the transcendence of Allah. For Muslims there is no God in existence other than Allah. Allah is one person, a strict unity, who is the creator of the universe and the sovereign of all. This does not mean, however, that Muslims "remain silent on the topic of God . . . because God is a revealing God Who has spoken in His Word. It is also practically impossible [to remain silent about God] because the subject of God must be taught to children and explained to the world."[15]

The ninety-nine names Islam ascribes to Allah may be called his attributes, that is, the distinctives that religion has attributed to Allah. No doubt, Allah is the Wholly Other in Islam. If the diety of Islam has relational qualities, they are attributed to his power to create, to his majesty, glory, rulership, providence, and mercy. Neither in his essence, nor in terms of his attributes,

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[12]"There is a range of definitions of pluralism and inclusivism, and the relation between the two obviously depends on these definitions. . . . inclusivism is the view that sees truth and salvation in other religious traditions but understand these as manifestations of the truth and salvation that are known normatively in one's own tradition. Pluralism is the point of view that holds all the great religious traditions to be roughly equal in regard to truth and salvation; furthermore, pluralism maintains that no one religion is superior to or normative for others" (Owen C. Thomas, "Religious Plurality and Contemporary Philosophy: A Critical Survey," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 [1994]: 197).

[13]Philosophical difference among religions aside, at the practical level any religion of work-righteousness may be classified under the broad umbrella term Hinduism. Indeed Buddhism began as a reform movement within Hinduism.

[14]For example see S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995).

[15]Rolland E. Miller, *Muslim Friends: Their Faith and Feeling.* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 41.

does the god of Islam redeem. There is no atonement in Islam other than a sincere confession of sin and repentance by the sinner. Forgiveness of sin is obtained by Allah's grace without a mediator. Islam is a religion for those who strive for salvation on their own. Jesus for Muslims is a very great prophet, second only to the last and final prophet Muhammad. Jesus is not the Son of God (God cannot have sons). Jesus certainly was not divine, nor was He crucified.[16]

It has been said that the fascination of Islam is its simplicity. It is a religion of community and equality with no specific priestly hierarchy. The brotherhood of Islam signifies that those who submit to the will of Allah are brothers (and sisters) and their racial and national origins do not stand in the way of partaking in the Islamic brotherhood. Most Muslims might acknowledge that they behave badly, but that does not mean that their religion is bad.

Muslims claim that the Christian church, and the church fathers have tampered with the Christian Scripture. As a creation of the early Christian church, the Christian Bible contains more than what Jesus said and did. Furthermore, even in the very Christian Scripture, Muslims do not find the Jesus that Christians teach and confess. The general response from Muslims to any claim on the Christian uniqueness may be summarized in Hesham El-Essawy's words: "I believe it is the Christian Creed, not the teachings of Jesus, that stands between Christians and Muslims. I understand from the reading of the Gospels only that Jesus is Unitarian, not Trinitarian."[17] El-Essawy further writes:

> With the Muslim view of God as strictly Unitarian, I think it demeans Jesus to think of him as a sacrificial lamb and it demeans God to think of him as requiring what is essentially the pagan practice of human sacrifice in order to be satisfied to the degree of showing mercy and compassion. It is abhorrent to the concept of Justice, be it human or divine, to take one person's life for the sin of another. Yet, these rather confused and ungodly concepts are exactly what the Church promoted for many centuries, as I understand its teachings.[18]

The defenders of Islam have left no loopholes for their critics to attack them. Nevertheless, the Muslim faithful boldly come to the pluralist religious roundtable with their own unique claims. At least here Muslims are amicably

[16]What is said here has specific reference to the following Suras of the Qur'an: 15: 26-27; 6:61-62; 4:157; 9:30; 5:17, 75; 4:157; 75:12.

[17]Hesham El-Essawy, "An Islamic View of Spirituality," *Interfaith Spirituality: The Way Supplement* 78 (Autumn 1993): 74.

[18]El-Essawy, "Islamic View," 74f.

disposed to Christians, assuming that they are of a monotheistic faith, although distorted, but in close proximity to the ultimate religion that is Islam. "For to God, there are only two religions: belief and unbelief. God calls the Jews, Christians and the Muslims, The People of the Book, not of the books. The Book of God is one. The people of God are one. To God, the religion of a true Jew or Christian is Islam."[19]

Any discussion of the trinitarian God is dependent on our understanding of who He is and what He does. If in the practically polytheistic Hinduism and in the philosophically Unitarian Islam (representing two strands of the world's major religions) there are no strong parallels for the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, contemporary western popular, as well as philosophical, thinking on God also does not make the authentic confession of the biblical Trinity either feasible or practicable. In a word, the American civic religion is itself a representation of a shared commitment to pluralism and inclusivism. What is more, perhaps with a view to creating a common ground for all religions around the table, the West has of late shifted its God-talk from a personal God to a God Principle, The Thing as Such, The Energy, The Truth, The Force, The Ultimate Concern, Wholly Other, Ground of Being, The Ultimate Reality; and in the context of inter-faith dialogue "The Most Holy One."

Making theology of any religion subservient to the pluralist and inclusivist agenda produces a strange, interesting, but ultimately inchoate outcome whose credibility founders on the question of authority. As Charles Arand observes, ". . . to believe that God blesses us and does good things is not necessarily a Christian distinctive. . . . The critical question centers on the identity of God. . . ."[20] The New Testament witnesses testify to the identity of God in Jesus Christ as His ultimate revelation. The God of the Bible is a God who creates, saves, and sanctifies. Bearing witness to that God is nothing less than witnessing the Trinity. Thus, in Christian witnessing, and in the Christian engagement with the world of religious pluralism, it is never too late or never too early to introduce the doctrine of the Trinity.

Confessing the Trinity in our world today is more caught than taught, as it is a gift given to human creatures by God the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian Christians therefore are begotten, not made, begotten of water and the Holy Spirit. Confessing the Trinity is expressing in words the mystery of God revealed uniquely and exclusively in Christ, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Teach and confessing Christ, if done right, will result in the confession of the trinitarian God.

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[19]El-Essawy, "Islamic View," 75.

[20]Charles P. Arand, *That I may be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (St.Louis: Concordia, 2000), 164.

In our world of pluralism and competing ideologies perhaps Paul Tillich's observation that "the questions arising out of man's estrangement are answered by the doctrine of Christ and the symbols applied to it" might prove useful for a dialogue with people of other faiths. The proposition that Christ is the Reconciler of the world unto God is certainly the message that soothes the ears of estranged ones. For Tillich the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—speaks directly to the problem of man's finitude, estrangement and ambiguities of life, as he writes, "The questions arising out of man's finitude are answered by the doctrine of God and the symbols used in it. The questions arising out of man's estrangement are answered by the doctrine of Christ and the symbols applied to it. The questions arising out of the ambiguities of life are answered by the doctrine of the Spirit and its symbols."[21]

Confessing the Trinity begins with confessing Christ as Lord and Savior. The Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, is the Christ who by His death and resurrection earned for humanity the forgiveness of sins and salvation from death. As much as the intent of confessing the Trinity is the salvation of souls, such confession must begin with the introduction of that person of the Trinity who bears the name "Savior." If the immediate goal of confessing the Trinity is conversion, then it may be that its ultimate goal is communion and fellowship with the Triune God.[22]

Witnessing the Gospel in the Twenty-first century

The primary witnesses of the New Testament church begin and end with the specific, uniform statement of the Gospel of salvation. The four Gospels portray Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as calling all people to repentance and faith and promising them the forgiveness of sin and life forever. Just as Jesus came to the world to "save [His] people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21), He commissioned His followers to call all people everywhere to repentance and to announce to them Him and the salvation He offers in His name. Peter or Paul, James or John, the New Testament writers began and concluded their discourses also as witnesses to what Jesus said and did as His life and message were binding on the salvation of all people. If a book is judged by its cover, the cover must then be a true representation of the book's detailed content. If the Christian church is founded on the specific mission statement

[21]Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 3:286.

[22]At least as a starting point, it is to be noted that elements of Christian faith have similarity with the personal theistic faith of south Indian bhakti traditions and the Bodhisatva figures of Mahayana Buddhism. Although Islam rejects the deity of Christ, His intercessory role between the Transcendent God and the estranged humanity may be a point those Muslims who are the least assured of their eternity with God will consider worth exploring.

of the One who has sent her in mission, then by her very nature the church must strive to accomplish that mission for which her Lord has commissioned her.

No doubt, throughout much of her millennia-long celebrated history, the church has had her highs and lows in striving to be faithful to her Founder's mission on earth. As part of that undertaking from her inception, the church has identified constantly with the poor and pleaded the cause of the destitute and the underprivileged. She has triggered the transformation of many cultures and has also conformed to the patterns of other cultures. For centuries in certain parts of the world, Christianity had enjoyed a sense of triumphalism as it continued to be the religion of royalties, kingdoms, and world empires. The Christian church has acted as an arm of colonialism and fostered imperialism, slavery, and oppression. Nevertheless, in other parts of the world subjected constantly to tyranny, persecution, and dictatorship, the church has raised her decisive voice against such evils in favor of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the dehumanized. She has been the front-runner in lifting much of the human race from illiteracy, ill health, and slavery. If she has cultivated critical thinking in the human mind, she has also been subjected to the scrutiny and critical judgment of the enlightened mind. All her life the church has lived a life of paradox.

From age to age, and from generation to generation, Christian Mission has been subjected to redefinition. By rethinking her mission to the world, the church has also reformulated the implementation of that mission in the world. In all such attempts, nevertheless, an interpretation of either the very person of Jesus or of what He said or did has been the basis from which these new definitions have emerged. Thus, for those who understand Jesus as the harbinger of justice and peace, He has become the Liberator. In the opinion of others who envision human equality and social harmony as the goal of Christian mission, Jesus has been made the bringer of the new humanity. Yet others have seen in Jesus and in His mission a revolutionary model that empowers human beings to fight against discrimination, inequality, and violation of human rights. Jesus and His mission have in fact become all things to all people.

Although traditionally the words "mission" and "missionary" have been associated with that activity the Christian church does in the name of Jesus Christ, Christians no longer claim copyright over these terms or their cognates. Whether signifying the proclamation of an unique message, offering directions for spiritual living, inspiring followers for effectively engaging in the human struggle for peace and justice, or making a difference in people's lives, mission-related words are a part of the thesaurus of most of today's religious, secular, and social institutions. In this context, it is only appropriate

that Christians, particularly Lutheran Christians, look at *their mission* in the world in the twenty-first century and examine what should be distinctively unique about it. Further, we need to consider whether there are certain aspects of the Christian mission only Lutherans can accomplish, or at least bring about with a sense of personal conviction and commitment, while we partner with others in doing *everything* we can for various peoples, communities, and nations.

What Bishop Lesslie Newbigin outlined early in the last decade as a triangular pattern of tension in mission, I believe, may serve as a basis for our consideration of the challenges and opportunities the twenty-first century poses for the common task. Of teaching and confessing the Christian faith Newbigin described this triangle consisting of (1) the pull of traditional culture with its normally powerful religious components, (2) the pull of modernization involving science, technology and politics brought about by the enlightenment, and (3) the pull of the call to faithful discipleship of Jesus Christ.[23]

In a Lutheran approach to mission, the first and third "pulls" (that is, the pull of traditional culture and the pull of the call to faithful discipleship) may be taken together. The "powerful religious component" of Lutheranism has a direct bearing on the "call to faithful discipleship of Jesus Christ." The Lutheran tradition of letting Scripture serve its normative function in doing theology applies also to a Lutheran missiology. With that affirmation, the other *solas* of the Lutheran Reformation (Christ, grace, and faith) also become normative when Lutherans engage in mission in any century and in any culture. Such a position superimposes nothing on the mission agenda the Lord of the church set for Himself and for His mission. His mission was to *call* people to repentance, and to *gather* them around the greatest treasure of the church, i.e., the Gospel. Luther proposed the same scheme in the first and sixty-second of his Ninety-five Theses: (1) "Our Lord and master Jesus Christ, (when he said, *poenitentiam agite*) willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance," and (62) "The true treasure of the church is the Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God." Lutheran involvement in mission therefore cannot be considered holistic without openly sharing with the world the Church's *true treasure.*

When thinking mission in the twenty-first century, it is good to recall that historians have called the nineteenth century the "great mission century." The great mission century thought so greatly of the Great Commission that several Christian movements envisioned the evangelization of the whole world a task

[23]Lesslie Newbigin, preface to *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, ed. James M. Philips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 5.

that would be accomplished fully in their lifetime. But, as common knowledge has it, that noble and sincere wish of our mothers and fathers in the faith still remains unfulfilled, although by means of their diligence and earnestness the aroma of the Gospel has filled much of our world today.

To be sure, throughout the twentieth century, particularly during the past fifty years, Christian mission has assumed a much broader definition. Perhaps the second "pull" of the Newbigin triangle (of modernization involving science, technology, and politics) has played a major role in the development of this new, inclusive, definition of mission. *Definition* calls for a definitive statement on a term or concept and hence sets boundaries to it. Since mission—yes Christian mission—today covers a vast expanse of topics and thus defies definition, we would rather describe it than define it. I will highlight therefore three of the many details of a description of mission. These may be viewed as challenges as well as opportunities.

(1) **Globalization:** Christianity is the first major world religion that from the very beginning forged ahead with a structured and intensive global agenda for mission in an ongoing manner. It is true that the religion of Buddhism that preceded Christianity by a few hundred years moved from its home base India toward China and to the far East as a missionary enterprise. Nevertheless, Christianity's movement from Palestine to the West has been significant particularly because the West soon became the base of operation for this new religion that was first conceived in the [middle] East. Rooted already in the new home [away from home], the Christian religion saturated Western culture with a new set of vocabulary, values, and perspectives on life. Her new home provided for her a Western appearance and built for her a Western edifice to the extent that the uninformed non-westerner still finds it extremely difficult to see the distinction between Christianity and Western culture. If numbers prove a point, historically the vast majority of Christian missionaries were also raised, trained, and sent out to the rest of the world from the West.

However, the axis of Christianity has been shifting gradually from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia, and South America. In fact, today, there are more Lutherans in Africa alone than in all of North America. While many in the West are becoming more and more inquisitive about discovering their pre-Christian roots, others from the traditionally Christian Western households, for the sake of discovering their own true and authentic selfhood, are turning to the East and to eastern religions as a better alternative to Christianity. Conversely, in many non-western countries masses are converting to Christianity in spite of the persecution and hardship inflicted on them by their own countrymen in the name of religion. If many nations these days are closing the door against Christian missionaries, native

Christians of these lands are devising indigenous ways to witness the Gospel to their friends and neighbors.

(2) The missionary scheme of other world religions: The ideal of a global village, as well as the idea of a melting pot, shall both be things of the past, perhaps in our own lifetime. If transportation and communication technology have drawn humans the world over ever closer, we are also seeing that more and more of us are striving hard to secure and safeguard our own private space. This attitude is ever more true in the religious sphere. Religions travel with their followers. They find their home wherever their devotees find their new homes. When new homes are built in a neighborhood there is every indication that the new residents have come to stay. Those who stay practice and propagate publicly the religion that came with them.

Furthermore, all religions are becoming conscious of their own identity *in* and mission *to* the whole world. In fact, like Christians, others also operate their own independent mission societies and devise their own missionary methods to share with the world their mission statement. Their missionary methods parallel mostly Christianity's, including websites that invite new believers to punch a key and say a commitment prayer. Other traditions – those that began as ritualistic and pedagogic – proudly trace their roots in history and make every effort at preserving and trumpeting them. Juxtaposed to the Lutheran separation of church and state, many religious traditions today operate with a political agenda, with the declared goal of stabilizing their own territorial identity, while offering another platform for raising national consciousness.

(3) The Scandal of Particularity: Theological explorations in syncretism and pluralism aside, Lutherans must learn to live with the "stigma" of what is sometimes called the "scandal of particularity." If the answer to the pluralist question, *No Other Name?* is an inclusivist *No Other Gospel!*, then there must be something special about that particular name, a name to which the New Testament witnesses have claimed a unique salvific component! Against that background of the Christian Gospel, and drawing full confidence from the Reformation *solas*, Lutherans must insist that there is no other Gospel and no other Name, the name by which God calls all people to salvation.

It is now thirty-five years since a landmark book on *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* was first presented to the students of world religions, with the assumption that Christ is at work salvifically in Hinduism. Although this work may have renewed the Christians' interest in studying other world religions, three decades hence there is no trace of any confession from Hindus or Buddhists on The Unknown *Krishna* or The Unknown *Buddha* of Christianity. If this is true, is it not also true that much of what Christians do with the good intention of discovering common ground and building healthy

relationships with other religions does not elicit the desired welcome from other religions themselves?

Lutherans face the challenges from the new multi-religious and therefore multi-scriptural context in lieu of their call to being faithful to the *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation. As much as we purpose to share with the world what we believe to be the *true treasure,* the "hermeneutic" on which we encounter others cannot be confrontational but relational. We will do well to balance the biblical propositions that God has surely not left Himself without a witness (Rom. 1:20) and that He desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). We will balance our bold proclamation of the cross by which God draws all people to Himself with our strong presence in the world by doing good and offering lives especially for people who walk the edge of the poverty line, suffer injustice, and are subjected to oppression.

Boldly we must deal with global realities in the context of the global nature of the Gospel. Whether enacted by Jesus, stated by Paul, or brought to light by Luther, justification by faith was not meant to be a doctrine of a particular denomination, but one on which any person's relationship with God stands or falls. When thinking mission, we must ascend constantly from the general Christian "God loves every one" mode to the specific "God saves everyone on account of the *grace* He lavished on all in Christ" mode. For that purpose, we will also benefit amply by balancing our study of Romans and Galatians with an equally careful study of 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. A broken world torn between cultures, personal preferences, and conflicts of interest will appreciate a word of reconciliation inasmuch as that word is rooted in the grace of God that saves all from all sins and all their consequences. Sharing that word will still be the mission of the community of faith gathered around the crucified and risen Christ in whom God has reconciled the whole world unto Himself. In Him all things cohere; in Him and for Him and through Him also His mission endures.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a formula of faith. A formula has behind it a history of formation. Formulae in any discipline result from a series of debates, experimentation, and reformulation, necessitated by the challenge of having to answer questions of relevance in that discipline. Once formed, such formulae assume specific, unique, and commonly agreed upon definitions that become normative for all subsequent discourses on the topic. The trinitarian formula is already at work wherever the Gospel of the Kingdom is proclaimed. Those who are drawn to the Kingdom by the hearing of the proclaimed word are so drawn by the power of the Holy Spirit who creates in them faith in their Savior Jesus Christ. And God desires all human creatures to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

The Doctrine of the Trinity in Biblical Perspective

David P. Scaer

Since our recent discussions rarely progress beyond differences on ministry and church fellowship, the topic on the Trinity evokes pleasure and surprise and brings us into a broader context where Evangelicals are caught up in the openness of God debate and some are using arguments based on the equality of the divine persons to support the ordination of women.[1] By coincidence "God the Holy Trinity" is the topic for "A Conference on Faith & Christian Life" scheduled in Oxford for October 6-8, 2003, with such luminaries as Avery Cardinal Dulles, Alister MacGrath, and J. I. Packer as presenters. Heino Kadai wondered how the Eastern Orthodox knew so much about the Trinity. One can only conjecture that he thought the biblical evidence did not support their detailed theology. Then there is the other side of the coin. Upon returning from a symposium sponsored by the Institute for Ecumenical Studies in Strasbourg in the late 1970s, Robert D. Preus reported that an Orthodox participant noted that the Augsburg Confession had little to say about this doctrine. Both assessments have merit. The place of the Trinity in Orthodox theology surfaces in their persistent rejection of the *filioque*. Lutheran efforts during the Reformation era were directed to justification, but commitment to the Trinity is seen in condemnation of the Arians and the Antitrinitarians of that day in Formula of Concord, Article 12. For all of its weaknesses, at least in Lutheran eyes, the Confutation recognized that they were not Arians, which in today's environment is an accomplishment and is a basis for ecumenical discourse.

Even after the Reformation, close agreement on the Trinity provided churches in the West with a catholic substructure. The substructure was later undermined with the rise of Enlightenment critical approaches, which posited a gulf between the New Testament and the Nicene Creed.[2] Historical quests may differ on the level of Jesus' divine self-consciousness, but most critical

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[1]Kenneth Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contempoary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002). For response see Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "Kevin Giles's *The Trinity and Subordinationism*: A Review Article," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7 (Fall 2002):67-78.

[2]Enlightenment theologians placed the divine sonship of Jesus in His Messiahship and saw the Spirit as no more than divine efficacy in the world. Richard H. Grutzmacher, *Textbuch zur deutschen Theologie und ihrer Geschichte vom 16. bis 20 Jahhundert*, 4th edition (Tubingen:Katzmann, 1961), 42-43.

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scholars hold that neither He nor His followers understood Him in terms of the first ecumenical councils. Trinitarianism belongs to the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, and is not simply a post-apostolic development. Later creeds were not created *ex nihilo*, but were rooted in Jesus' own description of his death and resurrection in the New Testament already took the form of creeds. Without denying the development of creeds, the boundary between the apostolic and post-apostolic eras may be more artificial than real.

The question of justification, *posse iustificari coram deo*, must be understood in relation to the Trinity. Without *coram deo* God becomes an auxiliary factor in solving the human dilemma. Its inclusion rescues justification from self-pursuit and makes all accountable to the God who justifies *propter Christum per fidem*. Pietism kept faith and Christ in the justification equation, but shifted the weight to faith and so set the course of theology in an anthropocentric direction. Awareness of one's own justification was more important than what one thought about God. By placing Christian consciousness at the beginning of his *Der christliche Glaube* and relegating the Trinity to the end, Scheiermacher solidified this view. Bultmann went further in his existential interpretation of justification without insisting on a particular understanding of Jesus.[3] Since "God" can embrace Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Wicca definitions, the doctrine of the Trinity must be allowed to re-occupy the central place which it had in the early church and still deserves.[4] Since no doctrine can be known or proven by reason or experience, doctrines are appropriately called mysteries, among which the Trinity is the most profound which even in glory is known only in Jesus. This cannot be taken to be mean that the Trinity is totally ineffable or undefinable only to be silently contemplated. *Inarnatus est* and *homo factus* are the gates to the

[3]Bultmann's definition was the Pauline doctrine of justification gone amuck. His views found their way into the LCMS via the St. Louis seminary in the 1960s and 1970s and almost brought us to our knees. Apart from providing a biblical basis for trinitarian understanding of God, the trinitarian model has provided a convenient scaffolding for philosophical speculation already in the Age of Rationalism and more recently in the theologies of Moltmann and Pannenberg. Everything has an opposite which is reconciled in a synthesis. Consider this definition by Kathryn Tanner: "The triune God is therefore being nothing other than Godself in unity with a world different from God, as that unity and differentiation find their culmination in the human being, Jesus, who is God's very own" (*Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001], 13).

[4]Justification may have been the doctrine by which the church would stand or fall in the Reformation era, but this honor in the first centuries and since the Age of Rationalism right up to the present belongs to God.

Trinity, but this mystery must be accepted in terms of the biblical revelation.[5] It cannot be subordinated to the old, metaphysical doctrine of God's unity nor can it be relegated to second level discourse.[6]

Posing a dogmatic question to the Scriptures presupposes that the questioner is doing little more than garnering support for an answer he/she already has and so he/she is not traveling on unchartered waters. This is so, but these answers in the West and the East were not the same. Following Augustine, the West generally proceeded from God's unity to the equality of the three persons, an approach that lays down a basis for a unitarianism.[7] The East began with the divine persons, a method that more closely reflects the New Testament approach and better preserves the place and function of each divine person. God is not a triumvirate with an annual rotating president like the Swiss Republic. Though historical reasons preclude using "subordinationism" of the relationship between the persons, interdependency is permissible. In deriving His life from the First Person, the Second Person is the Son and by this derivation the First Person is the Father. Without an eternal reciprocity, the persons become indistinguishable.

The Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday provides an annual dose of trinitarianism, but its phrase "the catholic faith" causes a greater stir than the trinitarian definition that informs the word "catholic." During seminary days, refuting evolution occupied a larger space than the Trinity or so it seemed.[8] Why debate something so obvious? In the 1950s, trinitarian invocations at the beginning and ending of sermons identified one as a sympathizer with the St. James Society. Things have changed. Four trinitarian invocations are

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[5]1 Timothy 3:16: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

[6]This point is made by Robert Jenson, "What is the Point of Trinitarian Theology?" in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essay on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwobel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 31.

[7]The great Lutheran dogmatician Friedrich Adolph Philippi began with his locus on God in which the first sub-topic was *Gott als absolute Substanz*. This was followed by the locus on the Trinity (*Kirchliche Glaubenslehre* [Stuttgart:Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1957], 2:1-216). In the second volume of *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (2 vols. [St. Louis: Concordia, 1970-1972]), Robert D. Preus dealt with the topic of God. Only after nearly 100 pages on God does Preus take up the doctrine of the Trinity in 50 pages.

[8]Breaking with the Augustinian model, Francis Pieper places his discussion of God's unity after the Trinity in the section "The Doctrine of God"; however, the first sub-topic is "The Natural Knowledge of God," followed by "The Christian Knowledge," which sets forth trinitarian definitions. Other sections deal with the Old Testament doctrine, its incomprehensibility and refutations of denials of it. No one sub-section coordinates the New Testament evidences. Of the 577 pages of the first volume, about 35 pages cover the Trinity. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951-1953).

minimal even for those not given to things liturgical. Luther's rubrics for daily prayers called for this quota and perpetuated an early church practice, namely, that to distinguish herself from the Jews with whom she shared a common Scripture, the church ended hymns and psalms with trinitarian doxologies. Even Protestants joyously break forth with "Praise God from whom all blessing flow. . . . Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Problematic is why a phrase found only once in the Bible (Matt. 28:19) occupies such a prominent place in church life, especially since the vast majority of scholars date the Gospel between 80-100. Were it not for the widespread use of Matthew in the second century, inclusion of the trinitarian formula would be a reason for pushing it into the second century. All this supports Adolph von Harnack's claim that the religion of Jesus was a loving Father unitarianism whose followers were to respond in like kind. Most scholars have not retreated from the view that the Evangelist and not Jesus originated the trinitarian formula. Let us assume the opposite scenario that Jesus is the author of the formula, which it seems is part of our confessional obligation, though this hardly closes the argument.[9] This raises the question why the allegedly earlier New Testament writings, especially those to be judged more theological like the Pauline corpus, did not include the formula. All this raises issues about methods of interpretation and origins of the books.

Lutheran dogmatics traditionally uses the citation method by which certain biblical verses are arranged according to topics or *loci* to show their truthfulness. Allegedly clearer passages are honored as *sedes doctrinae*, and the remainder are relegated to a subsidiary role and by themselves cannot be a source of doctrine. This division of biblical sheep and goats seems arbitrary.[10] Inspiration guarantees the authority of the cited passages. Canon criticism puts an equal value on the separate verses, because the biblical books were accepted as a totality. Literary criticism relates passages in a document to others passages in the same document and attempts to find a unifying theme often called a story line.[11] These methods pay little attention to a document's historical circumstances and its relation to other biblical and extra-biblical documents. Form criticism traces how sayings and reports of Jesus' acts passed from Him through Jewish and finally to Hellenistic communities into the Gospels. Miracles and doctrinal formulas, such as

[9]*Small Catechism*: "Our Lord Christ says in Matt. 28, ' . . . in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"

[10]This method is found in Graebner's *Doctrinal Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, n. d.) and the Synodical Edition of Luther's Small Catechism, and remains popular with clergy and people alike.

[11]For example, Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

"Jesus is Lord," are seen as later Hellenistic developments.[12] With its attention to history and tradition, it possesses a *catholic* element, but miracles and advanced doctrinal formulas have no place in Christianity's earliest layer.[13] Redaction criticism sees the Synoptic Evangelists as theologians in their own right, an honor reserved for John and the authors of the Epistles. This method does expand the field of play and introduces the words of Jesus in the first three Gospels into the trinitarian discussion.

Each method, even those we do not know, has its value. The citation method recognizes that because of its inspiration, the entire Bible has a trinitarian substructure and thus can be expected to offer trinitarian conclusions. Canon criticism also approaches the biblical documents as a unit and so the Old and New Testament passages can be cross-referenced in the same way the citation method does. Literary criticism takes a document on its own merits and attempts to locate the writer's theme(s). How one Evangelist presents the Trinity should be appreciated on its own merits. Form criticism recognizes that incorporated in the Gospels were confessions about Jesus that were later recognized as the heart of the trinitarian faith.[14]

The origin of the Gospels is also a factor in trinitarian definition. Most scholars accept a variation of the Two Document Hypothesis that "Q" and Mark were the sources of Matthew and Luke. A minority hold to the Two Gospel Hypothesis that Matthew and Luke were the primary sources for Mark. Literary and canon criticism and the citation method can avoid addressing this issue. Form criticism does not, but its conclusion that the trinitarian formula is not found in the earliest layers of tradition means that Jesus and the apostles could have hardly known it.[15] Here we are faced with

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[12]So Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 5th edition, trans. J. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). Since the first edition was published in 1913, this view is found throughout the twentieth century.

[13]Form criticism's line between Jewish and Hellenized communities is not above challenge. Long before the first century, Palestinian Jewish communities had been Hellenized, some even before Alexander's conquest. In spite of the cross pollination between the two communities, Jews were not Gentiles and resolving the tension between the them was an issue the early church had to address. This distinction remains a factor in studying the Gospels.

[14]Vernon H. Neufeld locates these confessions in the New Testament. See his *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, New Testament Tools and Studies, vol. V (Leiden: E. J. Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

[15]Doubts about the historical authenticity of the trinitarian baptismal formula are raised by Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972), 26-30. Heiko Obermann claims that the Anabaptist criticism of the necessity of baptism is supported by modern research which "has recognized that Luther's central biblical passage, the baptismal commandment, was added to the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark only later. The baptismal commandment is a teaching of the

an irony that only Gospel that preserves the Father-Son-Holy Spirit formula is associated with a Jewish-Christian community. To preserve a late dating, this community is identified not as one which was coterminous with Jesus and the apostles, but one in opposition to the revived Judaism in connection with Jamnia.[16] The *Didache*, a Jewish styled catechesis, adds another wrinkle. Variously dated in the fifty years before or after 100, it has the formula.[17] Our topic requires us to set forth the parameters in which the biblical texts are examined. Aside from our disagreements, it is a given that among the biblical documents that Matthew alone has a trinitarian formula, and so it will be at the center of our attention.[18]

Citations in other parts of the New Testament have tripartite division: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14) and "There is one body and one Spirit, . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4:4-6.) Separately or jointly, however, they do not confidently convert into the Father-Son-Holy Spirit formula, especially since "Son" is missing from both. John has trinitarian terminology and explicit discourses, but lacks the classical formula. The hypostatic Word exists face to face with God and is God (1:1-3). The Father exists in the Son who in turn exists in the Father (14:11-12). God approaches believers as three: "my Father will love him, and we will come to him . . . the Counselor, the Holy Spirit" (14:23-26). At the Gospel's conclusion Jesus breathes the Spirit on His disciples (20:22). Coming close to the classical formula is Luke 24:49, "I send the promise of my Father upon you." It contains the three persons, but it lacks such essential words as "Son," "Holy Spirit," and "name," and by itself it is not easily transposed into the trinitarian formula. Mark offers an intriguing and almost Johannine trinitarian perspective in his parallel to Luke 9:48, "Whoever receives me receives him who sent me." In Mark this becomes "whoever receives me, receives *not* me but him who sent me" (Mark 9:37). In Luke, receiving Jesus is preliminary to receiving the Father and so each person is distinct; however in Mark those who receive Jesus do not receive Him but the Father. Here

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early Christian community" (*Luther Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989], 231).

[16]W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 3 vols., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-1997), 1:133-137.

[17]Edouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, 3 vols., ed. Arthur J. Bellinzoni, trans. Norman J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht (Leuven: Peeters and Macon, GA: Mercer, 1990), 1:5-6.

[18]Not all scholars are convinced that the formula supports the classical trinitarian faith. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 3:686. "We see no developed Trinitarianism in the First Gospel. But certainly later interpreters found in the baptismal formula an implicit equality among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; so for instance Basil the Great, Hom. Spir. 10:24; 17:43."

unity exists alongside of a distinction of persons which is reminiscent of "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 14:11).

Apart from specific interpretations, the Bible by virtue of its inspiration is inherently trinitarian, which is evident in Matthew. The words of the Spirit of the Father speaking through the apostles are also the commands given by Jesus (Matt. 10:1,2 20; 28:20). A date towards the end of the first century suggests that the classical formula resulted from an evolutionary distillation of prior data, part of primitive "Protestantism" evolving into a dogmatic catholicism. A date before the Council of Jerusalem contributes to the probability that the formula can be attributed to Jesus, and so God as Trinity would belong at the front of the apostolic era and not to time when the apostles were long dead. Other New Testament references would then be interpretations of the classical formula. What is startling is that of all the Gospels' introductions, Matthew's prologue or title has the least trinitarian potential. Jesus is introduced as the son of Abraham and of David (1:1) and not as divine Word as in John (1:1-3) or the Son of God in Mark (1:1). Luke may have a reference to the Jesus as the Word in his prologue.[19] Apart from how this is resolved, Luke introduces a trinitarian action in the narrative of the annunciation. "'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God'" (1:35). Matthew develops his trinitarian theology more slowly. Only after Jesus' genealogy (1:1-18), does Matthew introduce Jesus' deity by the angel informing Joseph in a dream that his betrothed's unborn son will save his people from their sins (1:21). Like Joseph, Jesus is the son of David (1:1, 20), but unlike Joseph He has no human father (1:6), but is Emmanuel, a point proven by the Evangelist's citation of the LXX Isa. 7:14. By interpreting Emmanuel as "God with us," Matthew presents Jesus as God to his hearers in absolute terms not even found in John, where the Word is presented first in relation to God (1:13), or Mark, where Jesus is the Son in relation to God. Matthew then introduces the Holy Spirit into the narrative,

[19]Whether or not Luke begins with a high Christology depends on how "and" is taken and how "word" is interpreted in "the eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (1:2). If the eyewitnesses and the ministers are the same people, then this would be most likely the first or an extra-Johannine reference to the hypostatic word. Joseph F. Fitzmyer presents arguments that these were different groups, but favors one group is in view and that "word" is proclamation (*The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, Anchor Bible 28 [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981, 1985], 294-295). Arthur A. Just, Jr., is more definite: "Grammatically, [the Word] goes with both 'eyewitnesses' and 'ministers,' suggesting that for Luke the Word is living in the flesh of Jesus, . . . " (*Luke 1:1 - 9:50*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia, 1996], 36). He sees "the Word" as Jesus. Those who were only ministers of the preached word would have little value in establishing the authenticity of Luke's Gospel.

"that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (1:20), but only at the Gospel's end do we learn that the Spirit has a claim on the divine name equal to that of the Father and Son (28:19). For Matthew, Jesus' identity as God precedes the revelation of the Trinity.[20] The Evangelist does not begin with an abstract doctrine of God's unity or His trinitarian existence, as it was customary from Augustine through Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy, but with Jesus, who defines God and not the other way around. In dogmatic terms, the economic Trinity precedes, informs, and leads up to the immanent Trinity. Trinity begins with Christ.[21]

The first reference that Jesus is God's Son comes in his return from Egypt: "Out of Egypt I have called my Son" (2:15). In this way the Father is implicitly introduced. Matthew cites a passage in which God laments over Israel's persistent refusal of salvation offered first in the Exodus, but which had become systemic of her entire history: "The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols" (Hos 11:2). By heeding God's call, Jesus is the Israel of Hos. 11:1. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." As Israel, Jesus is also God's Son. Philo, in his interpretation of the theophanic angel of Exod 23:20-22, identifies God's First-born as Israel,[22] and so Matthew is an idiosyncratic exegesis. Whereas in 2:15, Matthew demonstrates that Jesus is God's Son by the application of a prophetic word, in the baptismal narrative he does this by referring to God's direct intervention. After the heavens are opened, Jesus sees the Spirit of God in the form of a dove coming upon Him and hears the voice saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (3:17). For the first time, Matthew weaves all three divine persons into one tapestry. By Matthew's counting Jesus among sinners (3:6; 14) whom He has come to save (1:21), the Evangelist gradually removes the veils from the trinitarian mystery which will be complete at his conclusion. Also here *homo factus est* remains key to the trinitarian mystery. A possible exception is the transfiguration where the words of the Father from the baptism

[20]By placing Trinity at the conclusion of his dogmatics and not the introduction, Schleiermacher may have unwittingly followed Matthew's schema but not his doctrine.

[21]It should also be noted that Matthew begins with Christ's work in explaining that the name Jesus means that He will save His people from their sins. Deity is implied since this is a work only God can do. This is fleshed out by the interpretation of Emmanuel as "God with us."

[22]*Conf.* 146. "But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a son of God, let him press to take his place under's First-born, *the Word*, who holds the eldership among the angels, an archangel as it were. And many names are his for he is called: the Beginning, *the Name of God, Word (of God)*, the Man after His Image, and 'the One that see,' *namely Israel*" (quoted from Charles A. Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57:13). This is based on his published doctoral dissertation, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, AGJU 42 (Leiden, Cologne: Brill, 1998).

announcing Jesus as His Son is repeated (17:5); however, this appears between the first and second announcements of His death and resurrection. God will be known first in the crucified Jesus whose atonement makes a full revelation of the Trinity possible.[23] As William C. Weinrich says, the "conviction that the Man, Jesus [is] the Revelation of the Father and the Bearer of the Holy Spirit, so that to speak theologically [is] to speak Christologically."[24]

Matthew first explicitly introduces the word "Father" in the Sermon on the Mount, where the word is used so often that it might be called a discourse on the Father. Jesus, whom God has acknowledged as "my Son," now acknowledges God as "my Father." Call this a trinitarian reciprocation. Jesus' followers will become like His Father in being completely reconciled to their enemies (5:44, 45). Prayers are offered to the Father (6:9), who sees in secret (6:4) and who will reward the faithful (6:6). Jesus' Father becomes His followers' Father who occupies a position to Him in relation to believers. This does not diminish Jesus' place as God. At the Sermon's introduction, Jesus is described as "opening his mouth," a phrase identifying Him as God: "for the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isa. 1:20; 40:5; Mic. 4:4).[25] He hears the pleas of those who face the judgment (7:21-23) whose standard is His words (7:24-27). Jesus speaks in an absolutist style without relying on the prophets (7:28-29). John attributes Jesus' words to the Father (14:10, 24), but in the Sermon He is the authority for His own words.[26]

Matt. 11:25-30 takes a mammoth leap towards the Gospel's trinitarian conclusion. At its center is what the scholars have called the Johannine thunderbolt or "the bolt out of the Johannine sky": "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father,

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[23]The two great confessions that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God are made in contexts of predictions of His death and the event itself (Mt 16:16; 26:63). From the texts themselves, it is obvious that Peter did not know the full import of his confession and that Caiaphas understood his own question, but refused to accept Jesus' testimony that it applied to him. We do not know with certainty the level of understanding of others who made confessions about Jesus. What concerns us is that the Evangelist is incorporating them in his Gospel to lead his hearers to the trinitarian conclusion in the light of which all these confessions will be properly understood.

[24]"The Face of Christ as the Hope of the World: Missiology as Making Christ Present," in *All Theology is Christology* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215-227.

[25]Consider also the description of Jesus giving the parables: "This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world'" (Matt. 13:35).

[26]One should also consider that with Jesus' reply to Satan that man shall live by every word that proceeds from God's mouth (Matt. 4:4), that within the context of Matthew (5:2; 7:24, 26; 28:20), He is referring to His own words and not the Father's.

and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." It is so out of step with the rest of Matthew that von Harnack saw it as a later addition. Oscar Cullmann challenged this.[27] Robinson, Davies, and Allison supported the section's authenticity, but saw no trinitarian reference.[28] Older liberals who rejected its authenticity correctly recognized it as explicitly trinitarian. Consider the following: (1) the Father and Son have an exclusive knowledge of one another, but they relate to believers through revelation; (2) in relation to one another, the Son occupies the first position, though in the traditional formula, He is listed as second; (3) both Father (v. 25) and Son (v. 27) reveal the other;[29] and (4) the divine persons are not known first in themselves, but in the humiliation of Jesus: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (28b-30). So even in this starkly trinitarian section, the *homo factus* remains as the necessary prelude to a fuller revelation. Christology precedes trinitarianism. In Jesus, God comes to the heavy laden, and in the Father, God reveals the things of salvation to babes (v. 25). Matthew, as the New Testament does not know of the revelation of abstract trinitarianism, confesses one which is always salvific in character.[30]

The creeds included by the Evangelist are consistently christological, some exclusively so (8:29; 14:33; 27:54).[31] So also Paul, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3). Peter's binitarian confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), is a step toward trinitarianism, because the Father is implicitly included in confessing Jesus. Prayers in the New Testament are offered to the Father and to the Son. Worship of the Son did not begin as an anti-Arian protest, but happened in the life of Jesus Himself.[32] Still to be explained is

[27]See John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, 2nd edition, ed. J. F. Coakley, (Oak Park, Illinois: Meyer-Stone Books, 1987) 22, n. 82; 315-316; 359-360.

[28]See n. 16 above.

[29]This anticipates Peter's confession, which is revealed to him by the Father through the deeds and words of Jesus: "Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?' And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them'" (11:2-5).

[30]This Father-Son interchange is found in the last discourse. In the parable of the vineyard, the Father brings judgment on those who kill the Son (21:33-43), and in the next parable, the Father gives a wedding feast for the Son (22:1-14). In the final pericope of the discourse, Jesus assumes the position of God in passing judgment on the church (25:31-46). Here (36, 44) as in the Sermon on the Mount (7:21-22), Jesus is addressed as Lord.

[31]Neufeld, *Earliest Christian Confessions*, 108-109.

[32]See Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 36-40, "The Liturgical Role of Christ."

the Spirit's inclusion in God to arrive at a full trinitarian definition. A prescience of the Holy Spirit's equal claim to deity is seen in the unforgivable character of a sin committed against Him (12:32). In this, His status is higher than the Son's and, perhaps, the Father's. His being called "the Spirit of God," (Matt. 3:16; 12:28) is analogous to Jesus' being called "the Son of God" and so originate in God in a similar way. The Spirit is a factor in Jesus' conception and baptism, at which time He attaches Himself to Jesus (4:1), but, unlike Paul, Matthew does call Him the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). A clue to the full manifestation of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ and as God might be found the promise of John the Baptist that Jesus "will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:11), language of eschatological judgment.[33] Though the words include Christian baptism, they more clearly point to apocalyptic events of the crucifixion, which result from Jesus' bestowal of the Spirit (27:50): ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν κράξας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα. Here is cause and effect. The Spirit's release causes the eschatological events promised by Jesus to take place, the temple's curtain is torn, the dead are raised, and the earth quakes (27:51-53)—events more astonishing than Luke's rushing wind and tongues of fire (Acts 2:14). Now that Jesus' great work of atonement is completed, the Spirit can be given as the Spirit from Christ and God can be known for what He is in Himself: Father-Son-Holy Spirit.

Introduction of Greek philosophical ideas in the post-apostolic centuries determined the course of christological and trinitarian discussion in the post-apostolic centuries, but these were already factors in the apostolic era in formulating doctrines on the resurrection and Jesus. Since the church by the end of the first century had gone from being a chiefly Jewish community to a Gentile one, this was inevitable. Genesis knew of God's Spirit as an agent of creation and the angel or messenger of God sent by God having the characteristics of God.[34] This tri-personal understanding of God provided a basis for trinitarianism to which Judaism reacted by turning their monotheism into a monolithic view, not unlike the Islamic view seven centuries later. No interpersonal relationships exist within God in spite of such enigmatic passages as Gen. 1:26. While we cannot say with certainty how far a monolithic understanding developed among Jews in Matthew's time, he had to address the question of how God could be also "Father," but "Son." A late date for the Gospel would mean that the Evangelist could have hardly been unaware of the "God" issue, which still separates Jews and Christians. Such a concern was also possible at mid-century. Matthew knows of Jewish-Christian differences about the virgin birth and the

[33]Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 1:316-318.

[34]For a recent and valuable discussion of this issue, see Robert W. Jensen, "The Bible and the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia* 9/3: 329-339, especially 330-334. Jensen sees the multiplicity of divine persons in such words as Angel, Glory, and Name.

resurrection, so there is little reason to say that he was unaware of the God issue. Caiaphas's reaction to Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God more than suggests that the issue was at the heart of Jewish-Christian difference. How Son and Father can both be God, which is the Jewish problem, is answered by Charles A. Gieschen's thesis that God's name belongs to both persons. "The Divine Name could not be separated from the reality it represented."[35] This is hardly different from what many of us have learned from the synodical catechism that the name of God is God Himself. Gieschen notes that the Evangelist as a Jew writing for Jews "would certainly understand the name of the Father to be the Divine Name. The challenging part of this formula for a Jew is that singular Divine Name is also possessed by the Son and the Holy Spirit. This understanding of 'the name' in Matthew 28:19 as the Divine Name is also possessed by the Son and the Holy Spirit."[36]

Gieschen's conclusion that the word "Name" refers to God prepares for the complete trinitarian definition at the Gospel's end. Jesus' claim to deity is introduced by the Evangelist's application of the Emmanuel name of Isa. 7:14 to Jesus. His followers proclaim the Name of God (the Trinity) in what they do Jesus (7:22; 24:5).[37] Because children know or bear this Name (18:5), they are to be received into the community which is constituted and recognized by the Triune God (18:20). The name of the Father in the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father . . . hallowed be thy name," presupposes the Father's claim to deity, and sets the prelude for the holding that the Son and the Spirit have an equal claim on the Name which is God Himself. Jesus comes to reveal the Father's Name (21:9; 23:39) and placing these citations prior to the narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection suggests that the fuller trinitarian definition (28:19) will happen in these events. Matthew advanced the Old Testament view of a tri-personal God to a complete trinitarianism, and in this he laid down the foundation for the rest of the New Testament. He did this by beginning with the infant Jesus as the God of Israel through whom we know the Father and the Spirit. Is there a theological conclusion to all this? Yes, for starters the Second Article comes first.

[35]Gieschen, "The Divine Name," 8, 13.

[36]Gieschen, "The Divine Name,"13.

[37]"On that day many will say to me, `Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'" (Matt. 7:22).

Trinitarian Reality as Christian Truth: Reflections on Greek Patristic Discussion

William C. Weinrich

An Introduction

With the Enlightment, the mystery of the trinitarian reality of God came to be regarded as an unwanted remnant of ecclesiastical dogma whose loss would be without significance for the life of Christian faith. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meaningful reflection on the Trinity was largely absent from or at least peripheral to theological discourse.[1] The twentieth century, on the other hand, has witnessed a remarkable renaissance of trinitarian interest (Barth, Rahner, Jenson, LaCugna, et al.). Nonetheless, within many churches the impact or the influence of this central doctrine of traditional Christian faith is hardly discernible. Rather, the relativism of postmodernism and the populism of contemporary church life often evacuate the specificity and particularity of the church's creedal and liturgical proclamation. We must understand that the trinitarian confession of God was always and necessarily will always be doxological and hymnic. Nothing is further from the truth than the belief that the confession of the Trinity was speculative and tangential to the central confession that "Jesus is Savior and Lord." Rather, the trinitarian dogma was nothing other than the exposition of the Gospel of the cross of Jesus in terms of the reality of God Himself. It articulated the confession that God is *such* that the events of the incarnate life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth for the salvation of humankind were the direct, unmediated revelation and activity of God who in His own reality is love, mercy, and life. The trinitarian dogma articulated the belief that God is *such* that He can and that He has communicated precisely Himself, so that He might be known by the world and so that He might give Himself for the life of the world. Christian faith is, therefore, nothing other than participation in the life of God Himself. Christian faith is nothing other than to possess God, because God through God and in God has offered Himself to us to be possessed. Eternal life, then, is not merely to be with God, but to live in God by a union with Him which is of Him. Trinitarian faith, therefore, grounds the reality of Christian faith, which faith is lived in the reality of the

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[1] An exception to this trend was the Lutheran, Johannes von Hofmann (1810-1877). See, Matthew L. Becker, "The Self-Giving God: The Trinity in Johannes von Hofmann's Theology, *Pro Ecclesia* xii/4 (2003):417-446.

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church and expressed in Christian liturgy. In a most precise manner, trinitarian faith defines, identifies, and specifies what Christians say when they speak and what Christians do when they act. It is Truth, spoken and lived.

The Trinity as Guide to Thought, Life, and Worship

> We do not worship a creature. Far be the thought. For such an error belongs to heathens and Arians. But we worship the Lord of Creation, Incarnate, the Word of God. For if the flesh also is in itself a part of the created world, yet it has become God's body (ἀλλὰ θεοῦ γέγονε σῶμα). And we do not divide the body from the Word and worship it by itself, nor when we wish to worship the Word do we set Him apart from the Flesh.[2]

As Athanasius goes on to tell Bishop Adelphius, the leper of whom Matt. 8 speaks was not a Judaizing Arian who wished to worship the Word apart from the flesh. The leper "recognized that [Jesus] was God," and so prayed, "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean" (Matt. 8:2). The leper, says Athanasius, "worshipped God in the body" (τὸν θεόν ἐν σώματι ὄντα).

Behind and at the basis of this monumental claim of Athanasius lies the assertion of the Council of Nicaea that the man Jesus, of whom the Gospels speak, was none other than God, the divine Son of the divine Father, the Word through whom God speaks Himself forth and in whom God makes Himself known. To understand the Nicene Creed and the theology that upholds it, one must understand that the trinitarian theology of the fourth century served one singular purpose, namely, to specify that God was to be known and worshiped in the man Jesus of Nazareth, and in Him alone. Through the Nicene fathers, the claim of the Gospel of John, "no one has ever seen God; the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known" (John 1:18), and the assertion of Irenaeus that "the revelation of the Son is knowledge of the Father," received extended theological explanation. Moreover, it is impossible to overemphasize the radicality and the exclusivity of the claim the man Jesus is the revelation of the Father. To know Jesus is absolutely coincident with knowing God as He is according to His own intrinsic and personal life. *How* God is God is revealed in the incarnate life of the Word of God, that is, in Jesus. In other words, the evangelical narratives of the New Testament are the definition of God. To speak rightly of God is to speak of the man Jesus according to the evangelical narratives of the four canonical Gospels.

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[2]Athanasius, *Ad Adelphium* 3 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:575; Greek: PG 26:1073-76).

This immense concentration of Nicene theology on the vicarious humanity of Christ had great implications for the totality of theological discourse and dogma. We will briefly discuss a few issues of premier importance. We might well begin with a quotation from Athanasius, which brings us directly to the center of Nicene orthodoxy: "Therefore it is more pious and accurate to signify God from the Son and call Him Father, than to name Him from His works only and call Him Unoriginate."[3] (Οὐκοῦν εὐσεβέστερον καὶ ἀληθὲς μᾶλλον ἂν εἴη τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ σημαίνειν καὶ πατέρα λέγειν ἢ ἐκ μόνων τῶν ἔργων ὀνομάζειν καὶ λέγειν αὐτὸν ἀγένητον)

Opposed to all pagan polytheism, the Arians desired to define and to name God in His transcendent otherness from all things created. Wishing to distinguish God from all creaturely existence, they asserted that the defining attribute of God was that He was "unoriginate," "unbegotten." God alone has no cause; God alone has no source; God alone is His own cause and His own source. He simply is. On the other hand, all other things, namely all creatures, have a cause; they have a source. They are, therefore, "begotten," or "created," which is to say that they exist on the basis of the will of another. Consequently, claimed the Arians, God is rightly said to be Maker and Creator, and we worship Him rightly and sufficiently when we name Him "Creator."

In response to this, Athanasius argued that such an account of God does not speak of God as He is in His inner reality. To speak of God as "Creator" is not to speak of God as He is according to His own nature, but only as God is in relationship to His works:

> What likeness is there between Son and work, that they should parallel a father's with a maker's function? . . . A work is external to the nature, but a son is the proper offspring of the essence (τὸ ποίημα ἔξωθεν τοῦ ποιοῦντες ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς ἴδιον τῆς οὐσίας γέννημά ἐστι). It follows that a work need not have been always, for the workman frames it when he will; but an offspring is not subject to will, but is proper to the essence. . . . And therefore the Unoriginate is specified not by contrast to the Son, but to the things which through the Son came to be. . . . And as the word "Unoriginate" is specified relatively to things originate, so the word "Father" is indicative of the Son.[4]

The language of the Arians speaks of God as "Unbegotten" and "Uncreated," and so emphasizes the self-sufficiency of God in His transcendence by contrasting Him with what He is not. The Arians defined

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[3]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.34 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:81).

[4]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.29, 33 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:323, 325; Greek: PG 26:72, 80).

God according to His absolute difference and distance from us, and so used negative terms, which are the opposite of everything created and human. So understood, God is essentially unknowable and unknown. It is as though one attempted to infer the personality of Harrison Ford by watching the Indiana Jones movies. Harrison Ford may be acting, but in his acting Harrison Ford is not identified or specified according to his own intrinsic and personal reality. Harrison Ford is neither knowable nor known in the role he plays in the Indiana Jones movies. In a similar manner, according to Arian thinking, in the creation of all things, in the narrative of the Old Testament, and finally in the narrative of the Gospels, God is working, but He is not specified nor identified according to His own intrinsic and personal reality in these works.

For Nicene theology, however, the order of Being precedes the order of will. To say that God is Father is to say that God *is* by way of a relation. There is no reality that we might call "God" that is prior to God *as God the Father*; there is no reality that we might call "God" that is prior to God *as God the Son*. Nor does God first come into relation by becoming the Creator of the world. There is a relation *in which* God exists (Father-Son) and this relation is prior to the relation *into which* God comes as the Creator of the world (God-World). If one might speak in this way, the starting point of Nicene theology for the knowledge of God is not the fact that God is Creator of all things; rather, the starting point is the Father-Son relationship, in which relationship God *is*. God does not simply exists *as God*; God exists *as Father and Son*, and this relationship is made known only in the incarnation of the Son: "For how can he speak truth concerning the Father, who denies the Son, that reveals concerning Him? Or how can he be orthodox concerning the Spirit, while he speaks profanely of the Word that supplies the Spirit?"[5] "And thus he who looks at the Son, sees the Father; for in the Father's Godhead is and is contemplated the Son; and the Father's Form which is in Him (i.e., in Christ) shows in Him the Father; and thus the Father is in the Son."[6]

This priority and centrality of the Father-Son relation had direct implications for the Church's understanding of creation. For the Arians, the Logos through whom the world was created was himself a creature. To be

[5]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.8 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:310; Greek: PG 26:28).

[6]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.6 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:396; Greek: PG 26:332). Also Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle* 38.8: "All things that are the Father's are seen in the Son, and all things that are the Son's are the Father's; because the whole Son is in the Father and has all the Father in himself. Thus the person of the Son becomes as it were Form and Face of the knowledge of the Father, and the Person of the Father is known in the Form of the Son" (NPNF, 2nd series, 8.141).

sure, this Word was "monogenes."[7] But to the Arians, this simply meant that of all creatures the Word alone was directly created by God. All other creatures were created through the Word. The result, however, was that the world was one step removed from the ultimate source of all creation; the world was not directly created by God and was, therefore, not held in being by the power and reality of God Himself. As such, the world was inherently unstable and prone to dissolution. For the Nicene fathers, on the other hand, the Logos through whom the world was made was one in essence with the Father and, therefore, the energy or act of the Logos through which the world was made was also that of the Father. The Father is, strictly speaking, the Creator of the world.[8] Moreover, the Arian claim that God was transcendently alone made them incapable of proclaiming a God who was perfect in love and joy. God might begin to bestow goodness on that which He willed to create, but that goodness itself could only be secondary to the unknown reality of God Himself.[9] In the Arian scheme, that goodness itself, as it were, comes into being. For Athanasius, on the other hand, the Father-Son relation is the constitutive reality of that God who creates the world, and is, therefore, pre-existent to the world and indeed to the act of creation itself. As Athanasius expressed it, the divine essence is itself fruitful; the nature of God is itself generative (γεννητικὴ φύσις).[10] He accuses the Arians of proclaiming a God who is as barren as a light that does not lighten and as a fountain that does not give forth water. However, God does not need another who is not God in order to exist in the freedom of love, nor does God need another who is not God in order to delight in the perfection of joy. God does not become more perfect in love in that He creates the world. He is Himself perfect love. However, when God the Father creates through God the Son, a true other is created which is distinct from God, and because this other is distinct, this other is the recipient of nothing less than divine love and

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[7]According to Arius, the Word was "monogenes," that is, alone directly created by God. All other things were created through the Word. The Word, therefore, was a middle figure between God and the world. For the fathers of Nicaea, "monogenes" did not refer to him who was the first and unique creation of God, but to Him who was "from the essence of the Father" (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρός) and who was therefore "of the same essence with the Father" (ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρί).

[8]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.33: "And they [the Arians], when they call Him Unoriginate, name Him only from His works, and know not the Son any more than the Greeks; but he who calls God 'Father,' names Him from the Word; and knowing the Word, he acknowledges Him to be Framer of all, and understands that through Him all things have been made" (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:82).

[9]Note the abstract description of God that Arius gives to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria: "God, being the cause of all things, is Unbegun and Sole" (ὁ θεος. . . ἔστιν ἄναρχος μονώτατος; *De Synodis* 16; NPNF, 2nd series, 4:458; Greek: PG 26:709).

[10]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* II.2 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:349; Greek: PG 26:149).

goodness. The Father-Son relation is the ultimate ground of created reality as the object of divine care and benevolence. Because God is perfect in the relation of the Father and the Son, God is free to create as the expression of His own love.[11]

As one can easily see in the great work of Athanasius against the Arians, the struggle for Nicene orthodoxy was pre-eminently a debate concerning how the church should read its Scriptures. Believing the personal Word of God to be a creature, the Arians read those texts of the New Testament that speak of Christ's humility to refer directly to the Word and so to demonstrate His subordination. A fourth century Nicene document indicates the Arian approach to reading the New Testament: "Those who wish to understand the Holy Scriptures by an evil method, wish to adduce the human words concerning the poverty of the Son of God to establish their own blasphemy."[12] The Arians adduce a plethora of texts indicating that Christ was given life, that He admits ignorance of the time of the end, and the like.[13] How can He, they argued, be true God and of the essence of the Father if such limitations are ascribed to Him by the Scriptures. To this, the Nicene fathers replied that the Arians were ignorant of the fundamental narrative plot of the Scriptures. The Scriptures were the narrative of the salvation of humankind through the gracious condescension of God the Son into the flesh. Marcellus of Ancyra writes simply, "The whole significance of the Christian account is found in the lowly words and deeds."[14] And he quotes the apostle Paul to provide the interpretative key for reading the Scriptures. Marcellus quotes together 2 Cor. 8:9 and Eph. 3:1f.[15] to claim that the Scriptures testify to one determinative story line: "God the Son became flesh, so that His flesh might become God the Word." The "human words concerning the poverty of the Son of God,"

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[11]This point had already been made by Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.38.3: "In the beginning God formed Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but that He might have someone upon whom to confer His benefits." For the significance of Nicene theology for the doctrine of creation, see especially George Florovsky, "The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius," *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962): 36-57.

[12]Marcellus of Ancyra, *De incarn. et contra Arianos* 1 (PG 26:984-85). This text was transmitted in the *corpus* of Athanasius, but most scholars now dispute Athanasian authorship. The attribution to Marcellus is common, but lacks scholarly consensus.

[13]Marcellus lists John 5:26; 10:36; Matt. 26:32; Mark 10:18; 13:32; Gal. 1:1.

[14]Marcellus, *De incarn. et contra Arianos* 1 (πᾶσα δὲ ἀκρίβεια τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ ἐν τοῖς εὐτελέσι ῥήμασι καὶ πράγμασιν εὑρίσκεται; PG 26:985).

[15]2 Cor. 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how, although He was rich, yet He became poor for our sakes, so that we by His poverty might become rich"; Eph. 3:1f: "So that you may be enabled to understand with all the saints what is the breadth, the length, the depth, and the height, in fact to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with the whole fullness of God." The richness of Christ is nothing other than the whole fullness of God.

therefore, refer to the human nature which God the Son condescended to assume for our sake. This interpretative key for reading and interpreting the Scriptures is explicit already in the Nicene Creed itself which says, "who [God the Son] *for us and for our salvation* came down from heaven and was incarnated by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary." This One, the incarnate Son, is He who is born, who suffers under Pontius Pilate, who dies, who is buried, and is resurrected from the dead. This One who is true God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, for our salvation became man by taking flesh into Himself, so that in Him and through Him the flesh might receive the things which are the proper possession of the Son of the Father.

The Scriptures, argued the Nicene fathers, speak according to this pattern of the humiliation of the Son into the flesh for the salvation of humankind. For the Nicene interpretative process this narrative of salvation[16] demanded a "double account of the Savior": "that He *was* ever God, and *is* the Son, being the Father's Word and Radiance and Wisdom; and that *afterward* for us He took flesh of a Virgin, Mary, Mother of God, and was made man [emphasis added]." As Athanasius claims, "this scope is to be found throughout inspired Scriptures, as the Lord Himself has said, 'Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of Me.'"[17] And to prove his point, Athanasius adduces the Prologue of John's Gospel. John first speaks of Him who "in the beginning was the Word" and was "with God." *Next* John says, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." In Phil. 2 the apostle Paul writes according to the same pattern: Paul first writes that Christ was "in the form of God" and *then* that He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant." The sequence (first-next) corresponds to the pattern (scope) of Scripture which conforms to the truth of the incarnation of the Son of the Father. In an important passage of Nicene exegesis, Athanasius makes the point explicitly. The Arians liked to adduce Prov. 8:22; Isa. 49:5; and Ps. 2:6 to prove that the Word of God was a creature.[18] The verbs "created," "formed," and "established" in these passages demonstrated to the Arian mind that the one who was created, formed, and established must be a creature, and that creature was the Word. But argues Athanasius, these verbs "do not denote the beginning of His being, or of His essence as created, but [they denote] His beneficent renovation which came to pass for us." "Plainly He exists *first* and is formed *afterwards*, and His forming signifies not His

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[16]What Athanasius called the "scope" (σκοπός) or "character" (χαρακτήρ) or "mind" (διάνοια) of Holy Scripture.

[17]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.29 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:409; Greek: PG 26:385).

[18]Prov. 8:22: "The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works"; Isa. 49:5: "And now, thus says the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his own servant"; Ps. 2:6: "But I have been established king by him on Zion his holy mountain."

beginning of being but His taking manhood." And then the primary exegetical point: "This is usual with divine Scripture; for when it signifies the fleshly origination of the Son, it adds also the cause for which He became man; but when He speaks or His servants declare anything of His Godhead, all is said in simple diction, and with an absolute sense, and without reason being added."[19] Thus, when Prov. 8:22 says that He was created, the addition of purpose "for the beginning of my ways" gives us the interpretive clue that the Scripture here is referring to the taking of the flesh. The Scriptures are the narrative of the salvation of humankind, and as such present themselves according to the purpose of God who is the Redeemer of humankind. The economy of salvation determines the "scope," the "character," the "mind" of Scripture. That is, how God effected the redemption of humankind in Christ determined not only the content but also the form of apostolic proclamation.

The "homoousios" of the Nicene Creed also demanded a different assessment of the nature and reality of the human predicament and of its solution than was possible under Arian assumptions. According to the Arians, the world and human existence were created by the created Logos and were, therefore, directly related only to a being of a secondary order. The world was like a building made by a carpenter who was himself sent by an architect. The architect might determine the layout for the building, but it is the carpenter, and he apart from the active presence of the architect, who carries out the task of constructing the building. Should the building be shaken by an earthquake, the architect is required only minimally, if at all. What is needed is but the coming of the carpenter to restore and to rebuild what was fallen. Yet, the restored building would still be related only to the carpenter, and would, for that reason, be subject to renewed disaster. For the Nicene theology, on the other hand, the world and humankind were related directly to God the Father in God the Word. Human sin entailed a fundamental breach between God and the world that was total and incapable of restoration, as it were, according to the original plan. It was as though the building made by the carpenter had been disintegrated by a nuclear blast. Redemption, therefore, did not simply require a forgiveness of sins and a restoration of the original creation. Rather, redemption entailed the bringing about of something utterly new, a new creation. What was required was a comprehensive reconciliation between God and His creation by which God places His creation on a completely new ground and gives to it a new stability. Salvation is not merely a return to paradise. Salvation is nothing less than the placing of humankind *in* God through the assumption of the flesh from the Virgin Mary *into* the Person of God the Son: "Man then is

[19]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* II.53 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4.377; Greek: PG 26:260).

perfected *in* Him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay, with greater grace. For, on rising from the dead, we shall no longer fear death, but shall ever reign *in* Christ in the heavens. And this has been done, since the very Word of God Himself, who is from the Father, has put on the flesh, and become man [emphasis added]."[20]

> For though He had no need, nevertheless He is said to have received what He received humanly, that on the other hand, inasmuch as the Lord has received, and the grant is lodged with Him, the grace may remain sure. For while mere man receives, he is liable to lose again (as was shown in the case of Adam, for he received and he lost), but that the grace may be irrevocable, and may be kept sure by men, therefore He Himself appropriates the gift.[21]

It was by way of the Nicene confession of the full deity of the Son that salvation had to be regarded as radical, because the malady was radical. Sin was not only forgiven; sin was undone, made of no effect, and the reality of the sinner so reconstructed that he could not sin again. Salvation is the perfect freedom from Sin/sin and from death, the wages of sin.

The Nicene confession of the full deity of the Son also had great implications for understanding the reality of the church. As we have seen, Nicene interpretation regarded Prov. 8:22, which speaks of Christ being "created a beginning of ways," to refer to the incarnation of Christ. "For the Lord's humanity was created as 'a beginning of ways,' and He manifested it to us for our salvation. For by it we have access to the Father. For He is the Way which leads us back to the Father."[22] However, in the passage of Proverbs, Wisdom is also speaking of the church which is being created in Him, for the church is the body of Christ. Christ is the *beginning* of ways, the "ways" being the life of the church which is brought to salvation through the economy of the enfleshed Son. For the Arians, humankind is related only to the created Word, who is Himself related to God only according to will. Therefore, reasoned the Arians, the unity of persons with God and with each other within the church could only be according to the harmony of will and the affection of mutual love. The Arians pointed to such passages as John 10:30, "I and the Father are one," and John 17:11, "Holy Father, keep them in Your Name which You have given to me, in order that they may be one even as we are one." The Arians understood such passages to refer only to a unity of will and not to a unity of nature, so that the Father and Son are one not because of what they are (homoousios), but because of their unity of will.

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[20]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* II.67 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:385; Greek: PG 26:289).
[21]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.38 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:415; Greek: PG 26:405).
[22]Athanasius, *Exp. Fidei* 4 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:85).

Since Jesus compares the unity of the Christians with the unity of the Father and the Son, and since the unity among Christians is clearly one of will only, the unity of the Father and the Son must also be one of will only.

The Nicene theologians, however, would not accept the logic of this Arian argument. Typical of their response is the long discussion of Athanasius (*c. Arianos* III.10-25). Contrary to the argument of the Arians, Athanasius claims that the unity among Christians is in reality not merely one of will and of mutual love. Christians do not exist merely in an external relationship with one another so that the categories of ethics, intention, will, or experience satisfy to define the reality of the church. In their unity, Christians are not a mere congregation, an assembly which is one only as an aggregate of persons is one. Rather, the unity which exists among Christians, the unity of the church, is constituted in the common union they have with the flesh of Christ who is Himself essentially one with the Father. In a paraphrase of John 17:11 ("let them be one as we are one"), Athanasius integrates the trinitarian, christological, and ecclesial dimensions of Christian unity:

> You, Father, are in me, for I am Your Word, and since You are in me because I am Your Word and I am in them because of the body . . . therefore I ask that they also may become one according to the body that is in me and according to its perfection; that they too may become perfect, having oneness with it [Christ's body] and becoming one and the same, so that as it were being carried by me they may be one body and one Spirit and may grow into a perfect man. For partaking of the same thing, we all become one Body, having the one Lord in ourselves.[23]

Although the unity among Christians is not the same as that between the Father and the Word—the first being by grace and adoption, the second by nature—nonetheless, the unity among Christians cannot simply be collapsed into an external unity of will and of affection. The unity of the church is itself a "natural" unity, since in baptism Christians have been united to the humanity of Christ and in Him who is substantially united with Father become, with and in Christ, one with the Father. Therefore, Athanasius can say of the baptized that they participate in eternal life "no longer as men but as proper to the Word." This is because in baptism "our origin and our infirmity of flesh have been transferred to the Word ... so that being born again from above through water and the Spirit, in Christ we are all made alive, the flesh no longer being earthly but having been made Word through the Word of God who for us became flesh."[24] The sacramental implications

[23]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.22 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:405-406; Greek: PG 26:368-69).
[24]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.33 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:412; Greek: PG 26:393-96).

of this discussion for the central and constitutive significance of baptism and of the Lord's Supper for the reality of the church are evident.

Finally, some words about the character of worship and of prayer in view of Nicene theology. As we have seen, the Arians denied the deity of the Son and, therefore, thought that they could name and specify God as "Creator" or "Maker." According to the Fathers of Nicaea, however, such a designation was not to specify God according to His own internal reality but was to designate Him only in relation to His works. As Athanasius argues, [the designation Unbegotten] "does nothing more than signify all the works, singularly and collectively, which have come to be at the will of God through the Word; but the name 'Father' is signified and is established from the Son alone."[25] If the worship of God and if proper prayer to Him arises from the knowledge of Him Who is God and of Him *as* He is God, then there is no proper worship of God merely in the recognition of Him as Creator.[26] As Athanasius further argues: "As much as the Word is distinguished from things created, so much and even more should calling God 'Father' be distinguished from calling Him 'Unoriginate.'"[27] God *is* Father and Son, and the Father is not known, not even His name "Father," apart from the Son. The Father is known in the Son and only in the Son: "He only who is really God is worshipped in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ."[28] Unless one acknowledges God to be Father *in the Son*, there is no address to God as He really is God. And it is important to identify exactly who this Son is in whom and through whom God is known to be and is named "Father." The Son or the Word is not the divine Son or the divine Word considered in Himself. It is Jesus, the Son incarnate, in whom and through whom God is known and is named "Father." Again, we quote Athanasius:

> We do not worship a creature. Far be the thought. For such an error belongs to heathens and Arians. Rather, we worship the Lord of Creation made flesh, the Word of God. For if the flesh also is in itself a part of the created world, yet it has become God's body. So, we neither divide the body from the Word and worship it considered in itself; nor do we wish to worship the Word by setting Him far apart from the flesh. Rather, knowing that "the Word was made flesh," we recognize Him who is come in the flesh to be God.[29]

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[25]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.34 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:81).

[26]Note the same issue in the discussion of Augustine concerning the Pelagians (*De natura et gratia* 2). The Pelagians argued that worship of the Creator and a right life sufficed for those who, for whatever reason, had not heard the Gospel.

[27]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.34 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:81).

[28]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.43 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:331; Greek: PG 26:100).

[29]Athanasius, *Ad Adelphium* 3 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:575; Greek: PG 26:1073-76)

It is only in the humanity of Christ that the divine Son is known, and it is only in the divine Son that the divine Father is known and is named. True worship names God; it does not merely mention His works. Anything less, and anything other, collapses Christian worship and Christian prayer to the address of the pagan who also knows God as Creator. Once more Athanasius:

> Since the Son is the image of the Father, it is necessary also to understand that the deity and what is proper to the deity of the Father is the Being of the Son. This is what is said, "Who is in the form of God," and "The Father is in me." However, the form of deity is not in parts. Rather, the fullness of the Father's Godhead is the Being of the Son, and the Son is whole God (ὅλος θεός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός). . . . Thus what things the Son then did are the Father's works, for the Son is the Form of that Godhead of the Father which did the works. . . . And he who worships and honors the Son, *in the Son worships and honors the Father;* for one is the Godhead; and therefore one the honor and one the worship which is paid to the Father in and through the Son.[30]

[30]Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.6 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:396-97; Greek: PG 26:332) Emphasis added.

The Biblical Trinitarian Narrative: Reflections on Retrieval

Dean O. Wenthe

A recent observation might set the stage for our reflections upon the trinitarian narrative of sacred Scripture. One student of the Trinity observes:

> Today, a trinitarian theology of God is something of an anomaly. Even though at one time the question of the Trinity was at the center of a vital debate, Christianity and Christian theology seem to have functioned quite well, for several centuries, with a doctrine of the Trinity relegated to the margins. Not until very recently has this fundamental area of Christian theology begun to attract renewed interest. If a genuine revitalization of the Christian doctrine of God is to succeed, it is critical to understand the factors that contributed to the current situation: a doctrine of the Trinity that most consent to in theory but have little need for in the practice of Christian faith.[1]

Could this be an accurate description of Missouri Synod piety, namely, that many "consent to a doctrine of the Trinity in theory but have little need for it in the practice of the Christian faith"? You may answer the question in accord with your experience. I do remember, however, a moment in 1986 when this very question arose for me. In conjunction with digging at Capernaum, I stayed at a youth hostel in Tiberias. Tiberias is thinly populated by Lutherans, to say the least. After checking the synodical *Handbook* and a bit of soul searching, I attended the Franciscan church on Trinity Sunday and heard from the pulpit a classic exposition of the Holy Trinity. As I walked from the service along the Sea of Galilee, the question arose: "How many Missouri Synod churches would be observing Trinity Sunday? And, more significantly, how many homilies would meaningfully engage this doctrine

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[1]Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), ix. Later LaCugna comments: "The ultimate aim of the doctrine of the Trinity is not to produce a theory of God's self-relatedness. Precisely this approach has kept it out of the mainstream of theology and piety. Rather, since the trinitarian mystery of God is a dynamic and personal self-sharing that is realized over time and within the context of human history and personality, descriptions of God as static, or self-sufficient, or essentially unrelated to us directly conflict with biblical revelation and with our experience of God" (320). Significant studies on other aspects of trinitarian doctrine are Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975) and Bertrand de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History* (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede's Publications, 1975).

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as a significant feature of Christian confession and life?" Again, you can answer from your own experience.

The few reflections that follow are meant to stimulate conversation and critical analysis on where we are and why we are where we are. Your own pilgrimage may have exposed different hills and valleys, but these are the ones recommended for your consideration.

First Reflection: To retrieve a meaningful engagement of the trinitarian narrative of sacred Scripture, it is first necessary to appreciate the distinctive claims and character of this narrative. A contrasting narrative might illumine this point. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is a window on the culture and thought world of higher education in North America. In a recent issue, an article entitled "Why We Aren't So Special," contains this energizing vision:

> At one point in Douglas Adam's hilarious *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a sperm whale plaintively wonders, "Why am I here? What is my purpose in life?" as it plummets toward the fictional planet Magrathea. This appealing but doomed creature had just been "called into existence" several miles above the planet's surface when a nuclear missile, directed at our heroes' spaceship, was inexplicably transformed into a sperm whale via an "Infinite Improbability Generator." Evolution, too, is an improbability generator, although its outcomes are considerably more finite.
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> Here, then, is a potentially dispiriting message for *Homo sapiens*: Every human being—just as every hippo, halibut, or hemlock tree—is similarly called into existence by that particular improbability generator called natural selection, after which each of us has no more inherent purpose, no more reason for being, no more central significance to the cosmos, than Douglas Adam's naive and ill-fated whale, whose blubber was soon to bespatter the Magrathen landscape.[2]

These paragraphs speak in stark language the unspoken assumption about the human race that fills the atmosphere of many academies. Is it any wonder that behaviors born of that assumption are all around us? To abort, to abuse, to euthanize in such an environment of understanding is almost understandable.

What a contrast to the description of humanity in the great trinitarian narrative of sacred Scripture! How radically distinctive is the claim of the Scriptural narrative from Genesis to Revelation that humanity is at the very

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[2]David P. Barash, "Why We Aren't So Special," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 3, 2003, B12.

center of all that exists. Here man and woman are the apex of creation! Indeed, creation is ordered for their benefit and for their flourishing (Gen. 1 and 2). Here, instead of capricious selection there is blessing and divine direction. Here, there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). Here, there is attention even to the very hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30). Here, the future entails a redemption of human beings and a restoration of creation (Isa. 65:17-25).

Have we lost, in practice if not in principle, the beauty and the coherence of Scripture's narrative for the life of the church? If the canonical texts have been fragmented by uncritical proof-texting on the right and uncritical dissection on the left, the inclusive and holistic nature of sacred Scripture *needs to be retrieved,* or at least this is my first suggestion.

The theological context in which we are called to carry out our vocation is succinctly described by the prolific pen of Walter Brueggemann:

> The great new fact of interpretation is that we live in a pluralistic context, in which many different interpreters in many different specific contexts representing many different interests are at work on textual (theological) interpretation. The old consensus about limits and possibilities of interpretation no longer holds. Thus interpretation is no longer done by a small, tenured elite, but interpretive voices and their very different readings of the texts come from many cultures in all parts of the globe, and from many subcultures even in Western culture. The great interpretive reality is that there is no court of appeal behind these many different readings. There is no court of appeal beyond the text itself, and we are learning in new and startling ways how remarkably supple the text is and how open the varied readings are.[3]

At the same time, it should be noted that perceptive voices are being raised to challenge this hermeneutical meltdown. One example might balance our glance at the contemporary contours of theological education. Ellen T. Charry, Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, has written a rich study entitled *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* in which she challenges the prevailing set of assumptions about interpretation and the theological task. But she can speak for herself. Commenting on her reading of the great tradition, she writes:

> For these theologians, beauty, truth, and goodness—the foundation of human happiness—come from knowing and loving God and nowhere

[3]Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 61-62.

> else. I realized then why this no longer makes sense to us. All of these have become disjoined in the modern world, and especially the postmodern world, with the unsettling consequence that from the point of view of the classical tradition, we are moral and intellectual barbarians. . . . As I worked on the texts I came to think of myself as an Irish monk in a scriptorium, carefully preserving the tradition. Classic theological texts are becoming more scorned than read. I have sought to read the tradition sympathetically because a community that rejects its past is doomed.[4]

The past had a biblical trinitarian narrative that worked at more than the intellectual level. It also worked at the pastoral level, as Professor Charry so rightly notes. Recent interest in a sympathetic reading of the church fathers supports this viewpoint, namely, that we ignore these voices at our own expense:

> Learning to read the Bible through the eyes of Christians from a different time and place will readily reveal the distorting effect of our own cultural, historical, linguistic, philosophical and, yes, even theological lenses. This is not to assert that the fathers did not have their own warped perspectives and blind spots. It is to argue, however, that we will not arrive at perspective and clarity regarding our own strengths and weaknesses if we refuse to look beyond our own theological and hermeneutical noses. God has been active throughout the church's history and we rob ourselves of the Holy Spirit's gifts if we refuse to budge beyond the comfort zone of our own ideas.[5]

Second Reflection: Literary and canonical readings of sacred Scripture can assist in our retrieval of the biblical trinitarian narrative. A very interesting and encompassing perspective on sacred Scripture comes from literary scholars who are attentive to how texts function and how their claims are negotiated with the reader. Eric Auerbach, in *Mimesis: The Representation of*

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[4]Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii-viii. At the end of Professor Charry's book, she offers this noteworthy observation: "Theology today lives on the margins of the secular culture, the margins of the academy, and the margins of the church. It could be that responsibility for this marginalization lies equally with a desacralized culture and with the field of theology itself. Perhaps the renewal of theology is not unlike the renewal of the Christians about whom our theological teachers worried, as a mother cares for a child who has lost her way in a confusing world. She must be healed with love before she can flourish again" (245).

[5]Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 35.

Reality in Western Literature, writes, "The world of Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, and is destined to autocracy. . . . the Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected, we are rebels."[6] This sense that the sacred Scriptures make a coherent, integrated, and inclusive claim upon its readers is critical to any adequate reading of it as trinitarian.

Richard Hays, New Testament Professor at Duke Divinity School, makes the same point in a slightly different fashion. He asserts:

> I propose that one reason we have lost our grip on reading the Bible is that we have forfeited our understanding of it as a single coherent story—a story in which OT and NT together bear complementary witness to the saving action of the one God, a true story into which we find ourselves taken up. In order to recover a sense of Scripture's coherence—in order to live into this story and perceive its claim on our lives—it is necessary to affirm the mutually interpretive relation of the two Testaments. When we lose this sense of the coherence of Scripture, the Bible becomes somebody else's story. . . . the Gospels teach us how to read the OT, and—at the same time—the OT teaches us how to read the Gospels.[7]

Hays' position, as all here will recognize, separates his methodology from that prevailing in the academy. Yet, in this view we see the classical view of the church fathers, the Reformation fathers, and a significant segment of the Christian community today. It is in a retrieval of this canonically integrated reading that its trinitarian contours will become most sharply defined.

Here it is only right to note the name of Brevard S. Childs who has heroically challenged prevailing methodologies by writing extensively on the

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[6]Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1953), 14-15.

[7]Richard B. Hays, "Can the Gospels Teach Us How to Read the Old Testament?" *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (Fall 2002): 404-405. Earlier in the article, Hays offers this analysis (402): ". . . in postmodern culture the Bible has lost its place, and citizens in a pluralistic secular culture have trouble knowing what to make of it. If they pay any attention to it at all, they treat it as a consumer product, one more therapeutic option for rootless selves engaged in an endless quest to invent and improve themselves. Not surprisingly, this approach does not yield a very satisfactory reading of the Bible, for the Bible is not about 'self help,' but about *God's* (emphasis his) action to rescue a lost and broken world."

merits of interpreting the canonical texts in their final forms.[8] At the same time, Professor Childs is not alone. A spectrum of Christian traditions have come to realize the huge loss when the sacred Scriptures are no longer read as a meaningful and coherent witness to the Triune God. Elizabeth Achtemeier, Carl E. Braaten, Karl P. Donfried, Thomas Hopko, Aidan J. Kavanagh, and Alister McGrath have addressed this loss.[9] It must be noted that as laudable as these expressions of concern are, many (Braaten, Childs) remain far too deferential to prevailing historical-critical assumptions.

Subsequent papers will focus more narrowly upon the witness of the Old Testament and of the New Testament, but permit me to exploit for the moment the principle that Hays advances, namely, that "the Gospels teach us how to read the OT, and—at the same time—the OT teaches us how to read the Gospels."

Each of the Gospels positions the baptism of our Lord prominently. The church's exegetes and Luther saw these accounts as one of the most evident manifestations of the Holy Trinity. Matthew, of course, ends his Gospel with the Dominical admonition to baptize in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' exposition of His relationship to the Father, along with His promise of the Spirit in John's Gospel, as well as the many trinitarian formulas in the New Testament Epistles provide a lens through which to view the Old Testament. In a similar fashion, the Old Testament lens illumines the New Testament.

Third Reflection: The clarity of the trinitarian reading should be traced to the Dominical hermeneutic provided in the post resurrection period, i.e., that Christ Himself was the source of this reading in all of its fullness.

To recommend your consideration of this viewpoint, two texts from Luke 24 may well serve us. First, to the Emmaus disciples, we read: "He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

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[8]Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis; Fortress Press, 1992).

[9]See Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, editors, *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). Key issues swirling about in contemporary hermeneutics are described in Roger Lundin, Anthony C. Thiselton, and Clarence Walhout, *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); see also the fascinating study of Eta Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism on Trial* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001).

Then to the apostolic circle, He appears: "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the psalms.' Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day'" (Luke 24:44-45).

Particularly pregnant are the phrases τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ at v. 27 and περὶ ἐμου at v. 44. The Old Testament, even after the Resurrection, is the Lord's catechetical choice in teaching the disciples about Himself. Walter Moberly keenly observes about these passages, "This risen Jesus offers no new visions from heaven or mysteries from beyond the grave but instead focuses on the exposition of Israel's Scripture. The crucial truth lies there, not in some hidden heavenly revelation."[10]

Entailed in this understanding is the organic unity of apostolic exegesis with its Dominical source. Jesus asserts such an intimate connection in John, chapter 14: "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, will teach (ὑμὰς διδάξει) you all things and will remind (ὑπομνὴσει ὑμὰς) you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:25-26).[11]

R. T. France, in his magisterial *Jesus and the Old Testament*, makes this point succinctly:

> The school in which the writers of the early church learned to use the Old Testament was that of Jesus. If we could have developed our comparative study further we should have found many more evidences of the deviation of the Christian use of the Old Testament from Jesus: the development of the theme of Servant, the selection of Messianic testimonies, such as Psalm 110:1 and the "stone" passages, the whole eschatological scheme, and the further development of the sort of typology introduced by Jesus, which reached its full flowering in the letter to the Hebrews. It is all the more remarkable that this distinctive development, often in such strong opposition to traditional Jewish theology, took place entirely, in the earlier period, among Jews. This is the measure of the influence of Jesus.[12]

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[10]R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51.

[11]This passage may well reflect early Rabbinic patterns in which the pupil needed to recall and to repeat the master's sayings. See Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Lund: C. W. K. Glerup, 1961).

[12]R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 225.

Fourth Reflection: A retrieval of the trinitarian narrative will revive meaningful catechesis and enhance our capacity to show the compelling logic of the Christian calling.

In a word, viewing the Old and New Testament as one trinitarian narrative provides clarity about who we are as moral agents, i.e., the indicatives describe our being so that the imperatives make wonderful and inviting sense. It is not insignificant that the Ten Commandments are introduced with the statement: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exod. 20:2). The character of God and the character of God's people are intimately related for the history of their relationship illumines why God's people should live in a formed and definable fashion.

An awareness of how critical the trinitarian narrative is for moral instruction is an antidote against "Enlightenment ethics" that seek to divorce the agent from his or her history and social reality. Kantian ethics strives "to generate universal moral norms from self-relation in thinking and willing."[13] When I was in the parish, I visited an FBI agent who had faithfully sent his children to our Sunday School. He clearly articulated to me that he regarded Sunday School as helpful in making his children into "good" people, while simultaneously indicating that he had no idea of who God might be. I tried in vain to convince him that the Sunday School stories and lessons were in every way dependent upon an understanding of God and His trinitarian ways with humanity.

The trinitarian character of sacred Scripture should concretely impact our *practice* of the Christian faith:

> Through the economy of creation, redemption, deification, and consummation, experienced in the context of our own personal histories, we are enabled to know, love, and worship the true living God. God's face and name are proclaimed before us in creation, in God's words and deeds on our behalf, in the life and death of Jesus Christ, in the new community gathered by the Holy Spirit. The form of God's life in the economy dictates both the shape of our experience of that life and our reflection on that experience. Led by the Spirit more deeply into the life of Christ, we see the unveiled face of the living God. God's glory is beheld in Jesus Christ who is the instrument of our election, our

[13]William Schweiker, "Images of Scripture and Contemporary Theological Ethics," *Character and Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 41. See also Benjamin W. Farley, *In Praise of Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) and Alasdair C. MacIntryre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

> adoption as daughters and sons of God, our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, and the cause of our everlasting inheritance of glory (Ephesians). In order to formulate an ethics that is authentically Christian, an ecclesiology and sacramental theology that are christological and pneumatological, a spirituality that is not generic but is shaped by the Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, we must adhere to the form of God's self-revelation, God's concrete existences as Christ and Spirit. The purpose of the discipline of theology is to contemplate and serve that economy, to throw light on it if possible, so that we may behold the glory of God, *doxa theou*, ever more acutely.[14]

Fifth Reflection: The triune character of Scripture's narrative can be illumined by a critical use of the category of character as God is portrayed in the Scriptures.[15]

One capacity exhibited by this research is its ability to view the Bible as a unity. Robert Alter writes:

> The biblical tale, through the most rigorous economy of means, leads us again and again to ponder complexities of motive and ambiguities of character because these are essential aspects of its vision of man, created by God, engaging or suffering all the consequences of human freedom. . . . almost the whole range of biblical narrative, however, embodies the basic perception than man must live before God, in the transforming medium of time, incessantly and perplexingly in relation with others.[16]

Perhaps even more helpful is the care taken to define how one accurately comes to know the character of the Scriptural personages. An ascending scale of reliability is suggested:

> The lower end of this scale—character revealed through actions or appearance—leave us substantially in the realm of influence. The middle categories, involving direct speech either by a character himself or by others about him, lead us from inference to the weighing of claims. . . . With the report of inward speech, we enter the realm of relative

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[14]LaCugna, *God For Us*, 378.

[15]The literature is vast, but representative are the following works: Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

[16]Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 22.

> certainty about character: there is certainty, in any case, about the character's conscious intentions, though we may feel free to question the motive behind the intention. Finally, at the top of the ascending scale, we have the reliable narrator's explicit statement of what the characters feel, intend, desire; here we are accorded certainty.[17]

Consider whether the portrait of God's revelation and communication in these various categories does not permit a narrative wholeness that holds together what Scripture has joined, namely, the multiple, rich, and varied ways in which God comes to His people. Over reliance upon select proof texts can isolate and obscure this wholeness, even as historical-critical fragmentation can remove it completely.

W. Lee Humphreys has sought to refine and use Alter's category of character to describe God as He appears in Genesis. The results are diverse, with God being described as Sovereign Designer, Struggling Parent, Disciplining Father, Destroyer and Sustainer, The Jealous God, Sovereign Patron, Patron Challenged, Judge of All the Earth, Deliverer, Savage God, God of the Future, Silent Patron, Providential Designer.[18]

Two comments are in order. First, much of the work by scholars in this area assumes a lack of historicity. Here the unity of God's revelation in word and deeds of time and space is ruptured. At the same time, if one accepts the claims of the texts as historical in character, the same insights are worthy of consideration. Secondly, this is not a new method so much as a refinement of classic Christian engagement and exposition.

As I reviewed this material, three descriptions of God's character came to mind. The first is Jonah's lament over the compassion of Yahweh. "But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, 'O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow

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[17]Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 117.

[18]W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001). Sternberg (*Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 39) supplements the criteria for assessing character with: "1. Temporal ordering, especially where the actual sequence diverges from the chronological. 2. Analogical design: parallelism, contrast, variation, recurrence, symmetry, chiasm. 3. Point of view, e.g., the teller's powers and manipulations, shifts in perspective from external to internal rendering or from narration to monologue and dialogue (often signaled by elements so minute as names and other referring terms). 4. Representational proportions: scene, summary, repetition. 5. Informational gapping and ambiguity. 6. Strategies of characterization and judgment. 7. Modes of coherence, in units ranging from a verse to a book. 8. The interplay of verbal and compositional pattern."

to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jon. 4:1-2). The second is the portrait of God in Ps. 136 where both creation and salvation history are seen as expressions of His enduring and steadfast love. Finally, God's speeches (Job 38-40:2; 40:6-41:34) in response to Job wherein God simply describes Himself rather than address Job's question. The mere realization of God's character is sufficient for Job!

Surely there is a sense in which God's character is never too far from every Scriptural text. Its triune contours have been seen historically in such texts as Gen. 1:26; Isa. 6:8, 11:1-11, 42:1-9; the "angel of the Lord" texts, etc., but how are we to describe the rich and manifold nature of the theophanies that are central to the Torah: the three visitors (Gen. l8-20), the burning bush (Exod. 3), the pillar of fire and the cloud which accompany the presence of Yahweh's glory in the tabernacle, etc.? Does not the category of character provide a faithful way to understand the diverse expressions of God's ways with humanity in a manner that preserves the Scriptural tensions and liveliness? The richness of God's character in the Old Testament trumps any view that would reduce His nature to an undifferentiated monad. A trinitarian reading is not only compatible with the text, but the truthful and holistic reading that the prophetic and apostolic witness invites for us. Apostolic models can guide us here. For example, how many of you have pondered St. Paul's statement: "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:3-4)?

Sixth Reflection: The trinitarian narrative can best be confessed and recommended when we acknowledge and embrace its particularity. This is especially urgent in our pluralistic context which, if we pause and reflect critically and historically, is not unlike the context that has faced Christians from the first proclamation of the Gospel.

Ponder for a moment the remarkable claims that the trinitarian narrative is offering: that in one segment of humanity and in one blood-line from Abraham through David, the God of all creation is revealing Himself; that in one place—a land that God would show to Abram and give to his descendants—He would uniquely dwell; that in one portable shrine, not in the great temples of the era, He would cause His glory to dwell for the benefit of His people.

Our culture permits each of us to have our private understandings of God and even permits us to express them. What is forbidden is that we confess with the Athanasian Creed: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except everyone do keep

whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity."

Seventh Reflection: An emphasis on the trinitarian nature of our worship will refresh the faithful with the fullness of sacred Scripture's witness. Our religious setting in North America can reduce Jesus of Nazareth to a mere means to achieve a pleasant rather than a painful future. The trinitarian narrative offers a portrait of heaven as fellowship with the Triune God rather than a five-star resort. This fellowship begins in our baptism as we are joined to Christ's death and Resurrection and hence to the life of the Holy Trinity. A renewal of baptismal catechesis will provide the faithful with a fitting hermeneutic, even as the baptismal formula was foundational to the early church's confession and understanding of God.

> There is no doubt that the Christians were distinguished from the start from other believers, Jews and non-Jews, by the fact that they admitted converts to the community of Jesus Christ by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28, 19; Didache 7). . . . This baptismal creed, based on the experience of the spiritual presence of Jesus of Nazareth, confirmed by God in His resurrection as Christ and Lord, represented a decisive influence for the whole evolution of trinitarian dogma and theology. As *norma normans* it determined three aspects of this: it ensured the predominance of the Father-Son-Spirit terminology; it showed the order these three guarantees of Christian baptism; and it suggested that all three exist equally in the divine sphere.[19]

The often observed rule that we believe as we worship—*lex orandi, lex credendi*—should cause each of us to ponder. Do we worship as though the blessed and Holy Trinity is the construct of our private piety and spirituality? Do we worship as though the divine drama of salvation were intended to meet one of our felt-needs or even entertain us? Do we communicate to those who visit our worship that the mystery and majesty and holiness of the Trinity is no longer central to His character?

No more fitting conclusion could be offered than to counter the contrasting claims of the prevailing academic culture that human beings are marginal or meaningless to the cosmos (David P. Barash's narrative on "Why We Aren't So Special") than the following exposition of the Triune God's character:

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[19]B. Studer, "Trinity," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church,* vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 851.

Christian orthopraxis must correspond to what we believe to be true about God: that God is personal, that God is ecstatic and fecund love, that God's very nature is to exist toward and for another. The mystery of existence is the mystery of the commingling of persons, divine and human, in a common life, within a common household. We were created from God, *ek theou*, and also for God, *pros ton theon* (John 1:1). God, too, lives from and for another: God the Father gives birth to the Son, breathes forth the Spirit, elects the creature from before all time. Loving from others and for others is the path of glory in which we and God exist together. The light of God's grace and life can indeed be dimmed or possibly even extinguished by sin, which is the absence of praise and the annihilation of communion. The cardinal sin, the sin that lies at the root of all sin (including but not reducible to pride) is whatever binds us to prepersonal or impersonal or antipersonal existence: the denial that we are persons from and for God, from and for others.[20]

[20]LaCugna, *God For Us*, 383.

Theological Observer

The Passion of the Christ and the "Theology of the Cross"

"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." As these words from Isaiah 53 flashed across the screen, an extraordinary cinematic masterpiece called *The Passion of the Christ* began. No movie to my memory evoked as much controversy. Almost daily reviews appeared in print, on television and on the Internet. What can be discerned in the fervor? By "critiquing the critics," can we identify a common issue among them? All have stated reasons for their dislike of the film, but those stated reasons are purely superficial. Underneath these reasons exists a basic presupposition held by three identifiable groups.

First, secularists tend to criticize the movie for its overtly Christian content. For some, the very idea of religious faith in the public arena is repugnant, especially if that religion is Christianity. But along came Mel Gibson and *The Passion of the Christ* right into the neighborhood's secular theater. Mr. Gibson has not only produced a film that takes seriously the central figure of the Christian faith but he also openly admits to being a believer in Jesus Christ. His faith is that of a conservative, even pre-Vatican II, Roman Catholic and he does not pretend to be anything else. The virtue of integrity of faith and public confession, however, is apparently lost on some and a flash point for others.

To the secularist, religious faith of any kind is considered a matter appropriate only for private life, not for public life. One may believe whatever he or she chooses to believe (we are, after all, "post-modern," whatever that means), but one dare not say publicly what one believes privately. The only public discourse on religion that is permitted is the degradation of religion, with the possible exemption of religious faiths seen either as minority religions or as being in active opposition to Christianity. Degrading comments about Jesus Christ are quite acceptable but nothing similar dare be said about other gods, like Allah. That would be insensitive.

Even more to the dislike of secularists, *The Passion of the Christ* takes seriously the historicity of the death of Jesus Christ. Many have decried the historical violence of the movie. It is not violence *per se* that secularists detest since even more violent films have received critical acclaim. It is a particular violence that took place some two thousand years ago and was directed at one who is proclaimed to be God. A Jesus who serves as a sort of guru of social values, a teacher of morality, and example of a man misrepresented by his followers is an acceptable Jesus; a Jesus who is "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities" is not. When Gibson portrays this Jesus as one who actually lived and suffered for humanity, the secularist fears the outcome.

The secularist cannot allow the foolishness of the bloody religion of Christianity to define the purpose and value of human life. The message of forgiveness and sacrificial love contradicts the very central ethic of this culture, where the human

being is no more than a chance product of improbability, the meaningless end result of an evolutionary process that itself comes from nowhere and leads to nowhere. It is a bleak universe for the secularist. The human being has no real purpose for being and no end other than the oblivion of death. But if Jesus of Nazareth is taken seriously, the secularists' universe is threatened at its very foundation. If the story of Jesus is true and God has redeemed this world by becoming a man, then human beings are not the chance encounter of molecules, but the intentional product of a creator. We have an immense value based upon the decree of the Creator who redeems His creation. The Christ we see in Gibson's film reverses the secularists' universe: God was in Christ, redeeming the world through the cross.

A second group of critics of *The Passion of the Christ* are those who hold a religious faith that is distinctly non-Christian. Most interesting among them, in my opinion, are Jewish reviewers. Some of the film's most vocal critics, as well as some of its strongest defenders, have come from that religious community.

The surface level charge against the film is that it is "anti-Semitic," a charge taken up by secular critics as well. The historicity of the biblical accounts of Jesus' final hours is sometimes challenged, but even when the historicity is not, the appropriateness of the film's portrayal of Jews is. In order to lessen the criticism, certain aspects of the film have been modified. Though the film regularly provides English subtitles to the Aramaic dialogue, one key scene does not provide the necessary translation of the crowd's response to Pilate's words, "I am innocent of this man's blood." In Aramaic the crowd responds, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25), but no translation appears. The audience is to hear the words but not to understand them. The words of Jesus to the "daughters of Jerusalem" (Luke 23:28-29) also do not appear.

It is true that the film does not portray the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem in a favorable light. But, then again, neither do the Gospels. The simple fact is that it was the decision of those individuals to destroy Jesus. Their witnesses failed to agree with one another. The real charge of blasphemy was altered to insurrection when they brought Jesus to the Roman authorities. This is not anti-Semitism; it is the assertion of the biblical texts recounting the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

Lost in the charges of anti-Semitism is the positive portrayal of Jews in the movie. A Jewish actress, Maia Morgenstern, the daughter of a rabbi, portrays Mary, the mother of Jesus. Jesus Himself is unquestionably Jewish. He is no northern European-looking man as He so often appears in western films. He speaks Aramaic, follows the Passover customs, and reflects the culture of His Jewish roots. While some Jews plot His death, other Jews seek to protect and comfort Him and mourn His sentence. Even the Jewish leaders' mistreatment of Jesus pales compared to the way the Romans treated him. Gibson does not call the audience to hate Jews because of what happened to Christ but to look within themselves and see the evil residing in all of us.

The real problem, it seems to me, is not the supposed anti-Semitism of the film. Rather, it is that hermeneutic flashed across the screen at the very beginning, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." There is the offense of the movie and the offense of the historic cross. This Jew, Jesus, bloody and battered, nailed to a cross, is openly held up to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 and, by extension, every Hebrew Scripture prophecy of the Christ. At the end, when Jesus dies, Satan is seen screaming in the agony of defeat. The earth trembles and the Holy of Holies is laid open. This man is the Son of God.

Finally, a third group of critics comes from among Christians. Ed Schroeder, a Lutheran theologian, provided a most interesting critique of the movie. In an Internet article called "Thursday Theology #305" dated April 15, 2004, Schroeder offers his analysis of the movie.[1] His reactions typify those of many Christian reviewers of Gibson's film. Schroeder is greatly concerned about what he perceives to be Gibson's Roman Catholic portrayal of Jesus' death in the film. He states, "The second hero (possibly the first?) is Mary. That is where Gibson's old-style Catholicism jumped off the screen for me. She too is a suffering servant. Hers is bloodless in contrast to the oozing blood of her son. And if suffering is the *sine qua non* of saving sinners, he presents her to us (almost) as co-redemptrix." Here Schroeder reveals a common Protestant fear of Mary, a fear that has no roots in the biblical or historical structures of Schroeder's Lutheran heritage. As Schroeder himself (with Luther) later asserts in his article, Mary is the *theotokos* or "God-bearer." Mary was exactly like all other redeemed human beings when she rejoiced in God her Savior. Yet her relationship to Jesus was unique in that she alone was chosen to bear, birth, and nourish the very Son of God. Thus she is the one that every generation is to call "Blessed."

Is there, in fact, a Roman Catholic flavor to the movie, especially in regard to Mary? Absolutely. Many of the scenes in the movie are not found in the biblical text but are the product of pious traditions most commonly held by Christians of the Roman Catholic tradition. But are these traditions historically true? Perhaps, but probably not. They are recorded in no biblical text. But one might ask why they developed and what role they actually play in the film. I could not disagree more with Schroeder's concern that Mary is projected as a "co-redemptrix." She is portrayed as a mother who watches her innocent, beloved son suffer and die. What mother would not rush to her fallen son's side? What mother would not follow him through his trials, beatings, journey to the cross and his ultimate crucifixion? She was there, after all, when Jesus spoke to her from the cross (John 19:26-27). The pious traditions, while not historically verifiable, would be actions expected from any mother.

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[1]This article, subtitled "Topic: Gibson's 'Passion' film, one more time," may be found at <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/Thur041504.htm>.

The embellishments of the film by the Mary traditions are exactly that: embellishments. Perhaps the offense taken by evangelicals to those traditions is simply rooted in the old fear of Roman Catholicism. I suspect, however, that the real reasons are far more profound. The emphasis on Mary leads the viewer to the startling realization that Jesus is not only the Son of God but He is also the Son of Man. To state it so simply shocks no one familiar with the titles given our Lord. We are accustomed to glibly spouting such words. What we are not accustomed to is pondering the meaning of the assertion that Jesus was the son of a very human mother and thus truly one of our human race.

The suffering of Jesus was no abstract suffering, endured by one who only appeared to be human. It was suffering that few have endured, to be sure. But human beings (even the rest of us who are only human and not, at the same time, truly God) can, in fact, endure tremendous pain if our will is committed to fulfilling a mission. Was Jesus' suffering beyond that which a normal human being might bear? Yes, both in the movie and in historical fact. Every record of the process of crucifixion by the Romans is a story of incredible brutality. That Jesus could have endured it all is made possible by only one thing: His commitment to fulfill the mission He had come to complete – that is, the salvation of the world.

Such an image is most unsavory in our modern Christianity. Sanctuaries once held multiple images of the suffering Christ. Many Lutheran churches had a crucifix as their focal point. There, before the eyes of God's people, was the image of Jesus nailed to a cross. Almost always, however, that crucifix was a work of art, partially hiding the horror of Calvary by depicting Jesus in peaceful death, head bowed after giving up His spirit, encased not in the wood and gore of a Roman cross but in the polished silver, gold, or brass of piety.

Today, many crosses on Lutheran altars are devoid of a *corpus*. Still other church buildings are more barren than the empty crosses on modern altars, with no cross at all to be seen, with or without a *corpus*. The liturgical cross is a rejected symbol since the modern Christian faith is supposed to be a positive experience, an uplifting, if shallow, encounter with God. More tragically, much of what passes as Christian preaching is as devoid of the cross as the building in which it takes place. For too many modern Christians, the message is that no one should feel sorrow by gazing upon an image and hearing words spoken about God suffering and dying *pro nobis*, that is, for us.

What is the common thread that unifies the basic criticism leveled by these varied groups of critics of *The Passion of the Christ*? It centers on the Theology of the Cross. I am reminded of another biblical text that serves as a hermeneutic for understanding human reactions to Jesus' cross. Saint Paul wrote, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:22-25 *NIV*). The cross, with its suffering and dying God, is as much a stumbling block and offense today as it was then.

Only in the cross do we see the hidden God. This is where God is found: hidden in the Christ, hidden in suffering, hidden in the ugliness of the cross. No one would expect to find God there. Not Simon Peter. Not Luther. Not the most ardent secularist. Not the most devout Jew. Not the most liberal Christian. No one. But there and only there do we find Him. Every fiber of our being resists that discovery because it contradicts all of our assumptions about God. How could the Almighty be weak? How could the Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, suffer, be crucified, and actually die? Human reason revolts against this and human wisdom denies that it could be so.

The opening scene of *The Passion of the Christ* is set in the Garden of Gethsemane. The appearance of Gibson's androgynous Satan there, of course, is not in the biblical account of the Garden, but is another embellishment. Satan asks Jesus, "How can one man bear the sins of the entire world?" It is as if Satan perceived that which we human beings cannot fully contemplate or understand. What was about to happen to Jesus would justify a world of condemned human beings and forever defeat every power of sin, death, and Satan.

But this is where *The Passion of the Christ* forces us to come to terms with our failure to fully comprehend both who *Jesus* is and who *we* are. Gibson's Jesus is no frail, beautiful corpse shining on an artistically designed crucifix. And He is certainly not the Christ of positive thinking and glorious, but cross-less, popular Christianity. He is the Lamb of God, the Sin-Bearer of the world. The horror of His scourging, crucifixion, and agony is the horror of our scourging, crucifixion, and agony. That is the great exchange. The sinless One dies; the sinful ones live. The One who kept the law suffers the death of a criminal; the breakers of the law, like Barabbas, are set free. The Holy One becomes sin; the sinful ones become holy.

And we live in the paradox of His power found in the weakness of His passion and cross. The contrast between "good" people and "evil" people seems obvious in the movie. But there is another problem. The Theology of the Cross insists that we see ourselves among those for whom the Passion occurred. Gibson has shown the bloody sacrifice for what it was and still is. As the Roman soldiers gleefully pursue their torture of Jesus, professionally selecting just the right instruments to inflict as much pain as possible, the blood begins to flow. Not just drops of blood but pools of blood. As they strike him, that blood splatters over his tormentors. As Mary kneels down to clean up that blood, it soaks her towels, her hands, her robes. It splatters on those that nailed His hands and feet to the cross. As Mary stands beneath her crucified son, the blood pours over her. Like the rain, the blood falls on both the "evil" and the "good."

Martin Luther, that great Theologian of the Cross, wrote in the "Heidelberg Theses" (1518): ". . . true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ" (*LW* 31:53). There is God, hidden, yet revealing Himself and in so doing also revealing who *we* are. We are not the meaningless result of the course of evolution or simply animals like all other creatures. We are the redeemed creation

of a God who has so loved us that He gave His only begotten son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Yet there is one more aspect of the Theology of the Cross that we cannot ignore. We are called by this same Jesus to take up our crosses and to follow him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor in Germany during the darkest days of the second World War, wrote, "When Christ calls a man he bids him 'Come and die'" (*The Cost of Discipleship*). To take up our cross has nothing to do with bearing those afflictions that come from being human. The cross of the Christian is properly only that suffering because of the Gospel.

To live with Jesus is to die with Him and to die with Him is also to rise with Him. The final scene of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is also one of the shortest. From the "Pieta" scene of Mary embracing the dead body of her Son, the camera shifts first to Satan screaming in defeat and then to a tomb. There the grave cloths lie empty and one sees so very briefly the Risen Christ, glorious in His victory and yet, in His hands, still bearing the tokens of His Passion. It is, perhaps, its very brevity that makes this Resurrection scene so powerful.

The Passion of the Christ, like the Theology of the Cross, ultimately leads the people of God to that empty tomb. This is the hermeneutic at the end of the movie, wonderfully balancing the hermeneutic of Isaiah 53 at its beginning. This is the essence of Christian hope in a life lived under the cross and through a call to discipleship. Our death is rooted in Him through baptism. But so also is our resurrection. That same cross of Jesus also leads us to the tomb with Him and to our resurrection with Him. This is in our baptism. This is in the blessed sacrament, that foretaste of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in the kingdom that shall have no end. This is our past, our present, and our future.

Daniel L. Gard

Affirming Our Exclusive Claims in the Midst of a Multi-religious Society: Advice From a Partner Church

A new wave of immigration has posed a great challenge for Christian citizens of Western nations. These newcomers bring with them distinct beliefs and practices that disrupt the religious homogeneity of many countries. In the past, denominational loyalties and rules for fellowship were treated predominantly as an intra-Christian affair. Now, the circle demarcating denominational identity is drawn in view of other religions as well, and as churches engage in that task, the dilemma of finding an appropriate response to them becomes apparent.

The current state of affairs in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is a reflection of this shift. Throughout its history, the Missouri Synod addressed and defied the practice of "unionism" and to a lesser extent, "syncretism." Though syncretism, too, was explicitly rejected already in her constitution of 1847, it was

done so perhaps in an almost prophetic and visionary anticipation of things to come, of precisely the situation we find ourselves in today.

How should we advise Lutherans to relate to other faiths? We need to affirm the diverse nature of our multi-religious world. We can no longer heap all those outside the Christian religion into one huge anti-Christian block as we have done in the past, and thereby consider our task accomplished. This simply will not sufficiently address the religious complexity of Western reality. Though Francis Pieper must be commended for bequeathing us with the orthodox classification of the one true religion versus all the other *falsae religiones*, this monolithic front must now be detailed to incorporate the specific peculiarities of each religion. Aside from the influx of immigrants, there is one other compelling reason for doing so.

The tragedy of September 11 revealed this to us. Those who brought this horror upon the Western world were adherents to the Islamic faith. In the aftermath of this event, one apparent predicament surfaced immediately. There is a conspicuous dearth in most denominations, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod included, of resources to address adequately the characteristics of the Islam with careful scholarship and expertise.[1] So, one lesson to be learned from these events is that schools, churches, and seminaries must step up to the plate. We must address this deficit with a teaching program that goes beyond traditional symbolics and details the distinctive characteristics of other religions in our curricula.[2]

That is not to say, however, that all the additional details about other belief systems should obscure the clear message of the church on the source and finality of salvation itself, Jesus Christ. Yet, there is no guarantee that this will remain to be so. Our *exclusive* claims are constantly challenged from outside our fellowship by more lenient *inclusivist* or radical *pluralist* stances that to varying degrees have asserted the probability or certainty of the salvation of the unevangelized apart from Christ.

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[1]One should, however, commend Concordia Publishing House for its recent publications on the subject: Alvin Barry, *What about Islam?* (2001); Roland E. Miller, *Muslim Friends* (1995); Jane L. Fryar, *The Truth about Islam* (2002); Ernest Hahn, *How to Respond - Muslims* (1995). Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne is also able to utilize further resources in the Zwemer Institute, a non-denominational institute for Islamic research residing on campus.

[2]The once widely-used text produced by the Synod, Martin Günther's *Populäre Symbolik* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1898) and its replacements, Theodore Engelder's *Popular Symbolics* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934) and F. E. Mayer's *The Religious Bodies of America* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), all have their shortcomings in this regard.

The Missouri Synod has not yet reached that point and thankfully so.[3] But its exclusive claims have been blurred by an invocation of complex laws of polity and by a play with words. This, in turn, deludes others, including us also, into thinking that perhaps our own exclusive claims and their rules of practice are unclear.[4]

The missionary task places all pastors before two seemingly paradoxical approaches. On the one hand, pastors should recognize the need to encourage all their members to strive towards a harmonious life with others, a *convivence* or convivial existence,[5] which recognizes the freedom to believe whatever one wishes and the right for everyone to practice it unhindered. On the other hand, they should be intent on committing their members to a missionary task that does not compromise proclamation and conversion with other options such as dialogue and mutual enrichment apart from transformation. Members should be asked to maintain a steadfast course that does not defy the unique status of Christ in the divine scheme of salvation, even if the contrary is stated in media and other publications.

Finding the proper Christian response in our multi-religious context has thus become an important priority for Christianity. Any advice that would give direction here would certainly be welcome. It comes to us from a partner church "The Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church" (SELK). Their important statement entitled "Guidelines for Evangelical-Lutheran Christians Living Together with Muslims in Germany," responds to the challenge of missionary witness and practice in thirty-seven theses.[6] Though it addresses Lutheran

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[3]In addition to the traditional position of the dogmaticians, J. T. Mueller and F. Pieper, such claims are enunciated in, "Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 15 (1986): 151, 162-163. The recently submitted published "Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (April 2004) also affirms the Missouri Synod's exclusive claims (8-9).

[4]The members in CTCR failed to reach agreement in their "Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events" on whether it is permissible for Lutheran pastors to attend those civic events with other non-Christian leaders at which prayers are offered (19-20).

[5]A phrase coined by Dr. Theo Sundermeier, Professor of Ecumenical and Religious Studies at Heidelberg University, Germany, in his article "Theology of Missions," *Dictionary of Missions*, edited by Karl Müller , Theo Sundermeier, and others (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 447.

[6]Original title: "Wegweisung für evangelisch-lutherische Christen für das Zusammenleben in Deutschland. Eine Wegweisung herausgegeben von der Kirchenleitung der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche (SELK) (2002)." The SELK is a church body of about 36,000 members who live in a country with a total population of about 82 million, of which 3 million are Muslims. The document can be ordered at the church's head office under the address: Kirchenbüro der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Schopenhauerstraße 7, 30625 Hannover, Germany (Tel. 011-49-511-551588/e-mail: selk@selk.de) or downloaded as a file from its website, www.selk.de (and proceed from

believers in Germany, this statement reflects the faith of Lutherans on the whole. For this reason, these guidelines are worth noting. Their advice is as follows:

1. Christians are advised not to accept the claim that Islam is a redefinition of a falsified Christian belief (Thesis 10), for Christians "already possess the complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They also expect God's final revelation as the fulfillment in Christ, whose return they await" (Thesis 7).

2. On this basis, the statement dismisses any thought that Islam and Christianity believe in the same God: "The confession of Islam knows only God as a single person (Allah), while the Christians confess the Triune God —Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Allah and the God of the Christians are not identical (Thesis 11). "Contrary to Islamic understanding, Christians believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who died vicariously by His death on the cross. In Him Christians have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. This good news of salvation for sinful man is not found in Islam" (Thesis 12).

3. There is thus an important distinction in how salvation is attained and worship should be practiced. The statement isolates the problem in the doctrine of justification versus work righteousness, of grace versus law.[7] In terms of worship practices the statement boldly erases a common misconception or temptation that since all have the same God a common worship might just be in order: "Living together in our society can lead to a desire to pray or to celebrate worship services together (e.g., prayers for peace, school-church events, marriage ceremonies). These desires are justified with the assertion that 'there is after all only one God,' to whom all, even with extremely contrasting conceptions, may pray, and that it is important to learn from the wealth of religious traditions" (Thesis 32).

4. For this reason there can be no compromise: "As much as we genuinely desire to approach Muslims by invitation and visitation and to improve human relations with them, we must make it equally clear that we can have no joint worship with them, nor engage in any joint prayer; because Allah in Islam is god other than the Father of Jesus Christ ("denn Allah im Islam ist ein anderer Gott als der Vater Jesu Christi") (Thesis 33).[8]

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there as follows: Interaktiv-Download-Texte-Islam). The unpublished English translation may be requested from the author of this article: schulzkd@mail.ctsfw.edu.

[7](Thesis 14): "For Islam the relationship between God and humans is seen completely differently. According to Mohammed's teachings man is justified before Allah, if he carries out the prescribed religious duties and is righteous toward his neighbor, that is, he does not deceive, steal or murder. . . . Christians, in contrast, proceed from the biblical statements on man's fallen state because of hereditary sin and they believe that they cannot be justified before God through their own power" (Thesis 13).

[8]This thesis continues: "Muslims reject the Holy Trinity, and as a consequence also the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This is recorded twenty-three times in the Koran. This in turn

5. With statements establishing the proper distinction on who God is and how faith and worship are properly understood and rightly practiced, the "Guidelines" proceed to the nature of missions. They do so by affirming the clear and straightforward message of Jesus Christ that is and will be contested and challenged by Islam[9]: "Whoever gives way here, is ashamed of the Gospel of the Lord Christ, and sacrifices faith and true love. Christian love comes from the faith, and the best that love can create is the passing on of this faith. Whoever claims to love his Muslim neighbor but does not desire his conversion to the Christian faith is deceiving himself. Consequently, Christian witness becomes an important task in a co-existence between Christians and Muslims" (Thesis 23).[10]

6. That clear and unadulterated commitment to her mission, however, does not erase the common things among Christians and Muslims. But the statement cautions us not to tinker with theological differences precisely because we are doing an unloving disservice to ourselves and our hearers: "When it comes to the missionary proclamation of the faith, the tendency to minimize the differences between Islam and Christianity must be resisted. If one speaks of all those things that Islam and Christianity have in common, then one should be alerted to the fact that similar terms do not mean the same thing and that Mohamed lived 600 years after Christ. Names from the Bible appear in the Koran. Also Jesus Christ is mentioned, but precisely here in His person fundamental differences appear. Even if Islam speaks of faith, welfare, and righteousness, it still lacks a Redeemer. It is not truthful to the purpose of the Gospel if one withholds the total biblical truth for the sake of dialogue. We have to speak the truth in all its content clearly to people with love and witness. Nothing is gained even from a dialogue with other religions when Christians compromise their faith and abandon it in favor of a randomly chosen pluralism" (Thesis 28).

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questions the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross because Allah does not need a mediator or a lamb (Sura 518, et al.). Crucifixion would be a disgraceful defeat for Allah and his ambassadors. Truthfulness in this matter requires that Christians, just as Muslims, do not conceal these fundamental differences; confessing Muslims also see them clearly."

[9]"However, there is only one way that leads to eternal life: Jesus Christ. Christian love respects the religion of the Muslim neighbor or one's co-worker as a part of their identity. But Christian faith sees Islam as its competitor and challenger, with which compromise is impossible" (Thesis 22).

[10]Thesis 27 is also worth noting: "In faithful obedience we bring the Gospel in word and deed lovingly and uncompromisingly to all mankind. That applies also to the Muslims, whom we love, because God loved them in Christ. . . . This attitude forbids crusades in any form and differs from Islam, which talks not only about 'peaceful invitation' (Sura 16: 125), but also of 'armed struggle' (Sura 9: 5). It should be noted, however, that this interpretation of the latter Sura (Sura 9: 5) is not unanimously agreed on by Islamic scholars."

7. Solidarity between Christians and Muslims is nonetheless in order. Christians and Muslims are both beings who have all fallen to sin.[11] Solidarity between the two further exists in the potential of uniting for joint work in pursuit of common civil good in the area of social services in hospitals, orphanages, and other social provisions.[12] Mutuality may also be expressed in uniting around common values against those that challenge them as does abortion, pornography, unrestrained sexuality, drugs, and alcohol abuse.[13] And yet, caution must prevail in this area of common concerns, as well, precisely because Islam, through the claims of the Koran and Shariah, does not separate the religious and the secular as do Lutherans in their doctrine of the two kingdoms. Mosques have and could become potential havens that advocate Islamic law for the world and a change in the democratic order of society.[14]

As Christian churches in Western countries are startled and shaken by statistics revealing the decline of membership, their theological leaders, including those who have formerly abandoned Christianity's exclusive claims, show renewed

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[11]"As Christians we regard the Muslim—irrespective of his nationality, religious affiliation or social status—as a creation of God who is created through divine fatherly goodness and is preserved by Him as well" (Thesis 17). "As Christians we see ourselves in solidarity with Muslims because of our common fallen state as sinners. That is the testimony of God's Word about the world and its people regardless of our own subjective opinion about our state of being. This realization guards Christians against a false sense of superiority over others and enables them to speak with fellow sinners in solidarity" (Thesis 18). "As Christians we look upon all sinners as those who live under the activity and testimony of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He delivers them from His anger and judgment—apart from their merits and worthiness. This realization, too, guards against arrogance and spiritual pride" (Thesis 19)

[12]"The fact that giving alms is one of the 'Five Pillars of Islam,' demonstrates that Islam has a strong social component that has not only to do with merely fulfilling external duties. The Koran admonishes that one be grateful toward Allah and to care for the needy with one's own income. Hospitals and orphanages are financed and modern social provisions are established. Families, too, support their members in emergencies. We respectfully acknowledge all these services" (Thesis 29).

[13]"The Koran speaks frequently of Allah's love in connection with the moral life. We thus claim that Christian and Islamic values are often shared in common. Both see abortion, pornography, unrestrained sexuality, drugs, and alcohol abuse as harmful and sinful. This joint concern could provide points for discussion that could ease and promote the coexistence between Muslims and Christians, create trust and offer the opportunity to deepen theological discussions" (Thesis 31).

[14]"In principle Islam does not recognize a separation between the religious and the secular realm, the worship service and secular policy. The Koran and the Shariah focus strongly on bringing the world under Islamic law. Because of this attitude, the danger exists that the mosque could become a place where calls for change of the free democratic order of our society are advocated. Admittedly, these goals are not pursued in every mosque or mosque organization" (Thesis 36).

interest in missions. It is thus encouraging to find a concerted commitment to missions espoused by a church body that is also a member of the International Lutheran Council (ILC). The "Guidelines" speak with clarity by using basic and straightforward statements that are lacking in many Christian circles. It takes the centrality of Christ as its vantage point so that, despite the apparently complex nature of missions, Christians do not loose sight of that what matters: A Christian *convivence* with others that at the same time does not compromise the mission. In short, it all comes down to the simple strategic advice that we "consider theologically the advantage of sitting down with Muslims, of shaping meetings in love and of assisting them, as much as is necessary and possible, and finally of witnessing to them the truth of the crucified and risen Christ."[15]

K. Detlev Schulz

Confessional Pastors Organize Non-Geographical Swedish Mission Province

Swedish Lutheran pastors and laity loyal to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions gathered on September 5, 2003, in Gothenburg (Göteborg), Sweden, to organize themselves formally as the Swedish Mission Province. The Province is a non-geographical group that covers the entire nation. It is the hope of those in attendance that they will be permitted to maintain and serve parish congregations throughout the country as a fourteenth diocese alongside, but independent of, the present national administration and thirteen diocesan bishops.

The group has been organized in response to the sad theological state of the church in Sweden. On the national and diocesan levels, the official organization is entirely in the hands of theological liberals. The church's self-designation as "Lutheran" was defined by the 1993 Kyrkomöte as simply indicating that the Bible, the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession of 1530, and the Swedish Church Order of 1571 serve as "the fundamental points of reference for the Church of Sweden as it confesses the Christian faith." In contrast to former times, church membership is now officially stated to be nothing other than the expression of a desire for fellowship. The church is defined as ". . . the place where people often turn at festive times of the year and for life's major events, occasions when, in happiness or in sorrow, we mark our fellowship with one another and with God." Neither regular attendance at Divine Services nor a strong faith are required or expected.

Life in the church is made increasingly difficult for confessionists. The "conscience clause," which originally allowed pastors to disassociate themselves from the church's unscriptural decision to ordain women to the holy ministry, has

[15]"Guidelines," 15.

long since been rescinded, and for over a decade all who seek ordination must clearly indicate that they heartily approve and support the ordination of women and are willing to serve alongside them. In many places candidates for ordination are required to receive the Sacrament of the Altar on several occasions from a woman pastor as an indication of their "good faith." No confessional Lutheran pastor who speaks against the ordination of women to the Holy Ministry as contrary to the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures has been permitted to stand as a candidate for the office of bishop. Pastors who take a stand against the ordination of women are not to be allowed to serve as interim pastors in Swedish parishes. Since the retirement over a decade ago of Bishop Bertil Gärtner of Gothenburg, who, like his well-known predecessor, Bishop Bo Giertz, was strongly opposed to the ordination of women on scriptural grounds, no confessional Lutheran pastors have been ordained in Sweden. A few pastors have been ordained in foreign churches and returned to serve in Swedish parishes, but that is not an option open to many.

Members of the group have been represented by the media and church officials as socially and theology backward and misogynist. Actually, a number of churchwomen, deaconesses, and members of religious sisterhoods are included among its members. The church's decision to accept direction from the politicians and social planners by approving the ordination of women and the present intractable opposition to those who disagree with that decision is seen to be a clear rejection of the Lutheran Church's *sola scriptura* confession in favor of an all-encompassing statement of *sola gratia*, which allows little room for a scriptural doctrine concerning sin and repentance. Modern liberal social attitudes serve as the new *norma normans* of the church's faith and life. The members of the Mission Province stand against this new situation on the basis of the clear teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. It condemns the adoption of new hermeneutical principles that reduce the Scriptures to the level of early Christian literature and the denial of the on-going value of the writings included in the Lutheran *Book of Concord* as *norma normata* of scriptural teaching, and the increasing politicization of the church. At present there is a strong movement within the church to approval same-sex marriages and the ordination of practicing homosexuals and lesbians on the same basis as that used to justify the ordination of women. Last year the "special relationship" of the avowedly lesbian sister of Archbishop K. G. Hamer and her lover was "blessed" by the Bishop of Lund, Christina Odenberg, in a ceremony in the Lund Cathedral.

Aware that only a very small minority of Swedes attend church at all and that among them are adults and children who have not received adequate instruction in the Ten Commandments, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the person and work of Christ, Holy Baptism, the Office of the Keys and Confession, the Sacrament of the Altar, and christian life, the group recognizes the importance of a strong doctrinal position and clear teaching. The Mission Province confesses the prophetic and apostolic scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Holy Word of God, the only rule and norm of all faith and teaching. As true and

reliable witnesses to that word of God, the Province confesses the confessions of faith that had been passed down from the early church: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions: The Augsburg Confession of 1530, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Schmalcald Articles, the Tractate on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Luther's Small and Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord.

After lengthy and thoughtful discussions over an extended period of time, the members of the Province, which consists of several diverse groups, including low and high churchmen and Pietists, determined that they should maintain the traditional ecclesiastical polity of the Church of Sweden. A bishop will be elected in the near future, to be confirmed and set in order in the episcopal ministry by foreign Lutheran bishops who are loyal to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Until the Province has in place its own bishop, Bishop Walter Obare, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, will be asked for assistance. The church that Bishop Obare serves in Africa is the fruit of the work of Swedish Lutheran Pietist missionaries.

The first priority of the Mission Province is the fulfillment of the Lord's missionary mandate to His apostles and church by the preaching and teaching of the pure word of God and the right administration of the sacraments, that the Swedish people may come to confess their Savior. To this end, candidates faithful to the Scriptures must be enabled to serve as deacons/deaconesses, pastors, church rectors and bishops, churchly structures must be set in order, and congregations must be gathered around the word and sacraments. Future plans include the division of the province into regional units, the establishment of a college of bishops, a consistory (church council), and directorate for mission activity. The group also seeks the establishment of a international group built upon the foundation of confessional Evangelical Lutheranism and contact with other confessions, when and where such contact is appropriate.

The leaders and members of the Mission Province have maintained the hope that their new province will be permitted to live and work within the framework of the Church of Sweden, but independently of the ecclesiastical and theological control of the Archbishop of Uppsala, the Church Council, and the diocesan bishops. This is both a practical and theological concern. The members of the Mission Province do not want to be labeled a sectarian movement, since they confess the faith that the Church of Sweden faithfully held until recent times and their ecclesiastical order is that which the Church of Sweden has traditionally maintained. The status of pastors, co-ministers, and parish property is also a matter of concern. However, all recognize that it is unlikely that the Archbishop and the other bishops will allow them a place in the official church structure, since they refuse to obey the directives of the official organization and do not practice pulpit and altar fellowship with women priests and bishops. The leaders of the Church of Sweden have consistently sought to represent the movement as hopelessly bourgeois and simply out of tune with the times. In an interview on

Radio Sweden late in October, Bo Larsson, Archbishop K. G. Hamar's chancery chief, stated that the ordination of women is so right that no reasonable person could ever oppose it. When asked why the public has not expressed its gratitude for the church's modern approach by attending services, he stated that even though they do not generally come to the services, it is important that the Swedish people have a good feeling about the church. Consequently, it appears unlikely that the Mission Province will be recognized by the present leaders of the Church of Sweden as anything more than another sectarian group completely separate from the church, on a par with the Baptists and other small groups.

Charles J. Evanson
Klaipeda

The End of Theological Amateurs in Global Missions

A remarkable event took place February 16-19, 2004 in the lush tropical hill country on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria. The Fourth International Confessional Lutheran Conference was hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and brought together 180 bishops, pastors, professors, and missionaries from Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the United States.[1] One participant noted two significant aspects of the gathering: "The conference was a solidifying moment in the process of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya becoming more confessional and at the same time it brought together many other Lutheran Churches from East Africa who share a strong confessional potential."

The conference theme "The Three Witnesses" was drawn from 1 John 5:6-10, which reads in part, "This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree." The conference sent a strong message to those Lutheran churches in Europe and North America whose missionaries established and continue to support Lutheranism in East Africa. That message was that mission practice that marginalizes the Spirit's testimony through the water and the blood, which gives mere lip service to word and sacrament, leaves the church in a very vulnerable, weakened, and chaotic state.[2]

[1]Conference speakers included Dr. Naaman Laiser from Tanzania, "The Work of Christ and the Means of Grace"; Dr. Kurt Marquart, "The Double-edged Sword of God"; Bishop Walter Obare, "LWF and Homosexualism"; Dr. Reijo Arkkila, "Baptism—the Beginning of New Life"; Dr. Timothy Quill, "The Presence of Christ in the Liturgy," and "Liturgical Preaching"; and Dr. Anssi Simojoki, "Christ—Key to the Bible."

[2]Recent statistics released by the Lutheran World Information in Geneva report that the number of Lutherans world-wide has climbed to 66 million. "The highest regional growth (9.3 percent) was recorded among churches in Africa, where an additional 1,115,141 Lutherans were registered, pushing the number of Lutherans on the continent from 11,953,068 in 2001 to 13,068,209 by the end of 2003." During the same period, Lutheran

It is time for liberal intolerance and western patronizing attitudes to be replaced with respect and humility. It should start with a moratorium on the importation of unLutheran mission paradigms, which undermine the gospel, sacraments, church, and holy ministry. It should also start with a moratorium by those who would impose their higher critical exegesis and unbiblical social agendas (ordination of women and homosexuals, same-sex marriages, etc.) on fellow Lutherans against their will. But above all, it is time to for us to listen our brothers in the faith.

Bishop Walter Obare welcomed the participants with an eloquent and unequivocal opening address challenging all the Lutheran churches in Africa and all foreign missionaries to uphold confessional Lutheran theology and practice. His sentiments were shared by the majority of the participants. A few quotes from Bishop Obare's address provide a good place for us to begin to listen. Obare began with a thoughtful exegetical treatment of 1 John 5:6-10 in which he emphasized that the "Spirit, the water and the blood" are more than mere historical references to Christ's baptism and crucifixion; they are also "a present day reality in the Apostolic Church. . . . The water giving its testimony about the truth of God cannot be anything else but the Holy Baptism. The blood witnessing to this very same truth of God cannot be anything else but the true blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist administered together with the keys of heaven, the powers of the forgiveness of our sins." He then offered a passionate warning against efforts to undermine the agreement of which these three testify.

> Secondly, my comment on this question of the three witnesses to the same and one truth. It has been fashionable for years in the field of the New Testament exegetics to try and distinguish between various supposedly contradictory teachings and doctrines in the Bible. This would, again, spell the end of the classic Lutheran doctrine concerning the Holy Scriptures, namely the divine authority (*auctoritas*) of the Bible, perfection or sufficiency (*perfectio seu sufficientia*), perspicuity (*perspicuitas*), and efficacy (*efficacia*) of the Holy Scriptures. It is fashionable in the New Testament exegetics to play various supposed doctrines and theologies against each other, John against the Synoptics, Matthew and Mark against Luke, Paul against Peter, James and Jude, indeed, part of Paul against himself as if St. Paul would not have been the author of all his epistles in the New Testament. Following this kind of historical criticism of the Bible the entirety of the sacred canon is ripped and cut into pieces, which have only little if nothing to do with each other. With this kind of theological pieces and fragments any error, heresy and abomination, can be advocated in the church as has happened so many times. How would we, then, even dare to discuss the three witnesses to one truth? Therefore it is extremely important that we train able exegetes and scholars of systematic theology who can successfully tackle all the

Churches in Europe continued their dismal decline in membership—down a staggering 640,000. Lutheran Churches in North America lost 84,179 members.

> epistemological problems behind modern critical scholarship of the Bible. We are grateful for the beneficial work of various Bible schools and centers of the past and present. Simultaneously, it is, however, of extreme importance to acknowledge the urgent need for higher confessional theological education in Africa. We also need more missionaries of significant theological caliber. The time of theological amateurs is over in the global missions if we are going to prevail. Unless this can be achieved, the future field of theology as a whole, will be seriously handicapped, since the foundation of all true theology, the Sacred Bible, will still be found in the Babylonian Captivity of liberal critical German, Scandinavian, English, and American theologies with their limited and yet strict philosophical presuppositions and categories.

Bishop Obare went on to criticize the so-called postmodern rejection of truth as absolute and the devastating consequences it holds for the future of the church.

> The Apostolic ordained ministry of men cannot be genuinely translated or interpreted into androgyny, a man-woman or otherwise gender-sensitive ministry against the plain texts of the Bible. Homosexuality, amongst other vices of ours, is indicative of mankind's wickedness in the state of original sin. It is a corruption of God's creation. It cannot be "interpreted" as an alternative positive manner of realizing sexuality and matrimonial relations as the trends run today and the jargons of a Western media controlled by a very limited and arrogant group of omniscient opinion builders.
>
> Against the tide of postmodernism and all fallacies of ancient paganism, we as biblical Christians maintain that above all varying and changing human truths there is God's eternal truth revealed to us in his Word. Parting ways with the Bible, thus, means separation from the living God. It is just because of the word of the living God that we can claim that the three witnesses testify in unison about the one same truth in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.
>
> Again, it is my intense desire that the clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, and of other Lutheran churches in Africa and elsewhere, as well, would be strengthened in this one scriptural truth of God and made wise and bold in their witness to the truth of God's testimony about his Son, Jesus Christ.

Bishop Obare's visionary words are a clarion call especially to us in the United States. We would do well to listen to them.

Timothy C. J. Quill

Kenyan Bishop Responds to Swedish Archbishop

In Sweden there are no longer any Lutheran bishops who will ordain men opposed to the ordination of women. Before a candidate will be ordained, he is required to receive communion from a woman priest. As a result, confessional pastors have organized a non-geographic mission diocese and requested Bishop Walter Obare of Kenya to ordain new pastors. Bishop Obare agreed to their request. This has caused quite a stir in the Swedish Lutheran Church, in the public media, and at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) headquarters in Geneva. On March 2, 2004, the Swedish Archbishop K. G. Hammer wrote to Bishop Obare objecting to his participation. Hammer wrote:

> Within the Church of Sweden there are many inner-church movements with different perspectives. Today they exist side-by-side by a wish to stay together even though there are different opinions regarding many of these perspectives. We seem to have reached a painful situation where the wish for some to stay together is no longer as strong as the need to stress one's own perspective.[1]

Bishop Obare responded to Archbishop Hammer with the following letter on March 16, 2004.

> In the Name of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
>
> "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it," 1 Cor. 12:16.
>
> The reason of my writing in response to your letter, the Most Reverend Primate of the Church of Sweden, is a delicate and serious one. I do it only after serious considerations and prayers.
>
> Lutherans as well as other Christians in growing numbers and in various parts of the World are becoming more and more aware of the anomaly situation in present or former Lutheran state churches in Scandinavia and Germany. With this lamentable and anomaly situation I mean the fact that classic Christianity, set forth especially in the Lutheran Confessions, has come under oppression and even persecution in those historically established Lutheran churches. For years, indeed, for decades, men called by God and qualified by theological studies have been denied ordination and full participation in the service and the life of the church. Behind these young men there are Christians of the rank and file who suffer together with them. Simultaneously with this kind of oppression and persecution the whole world testifies how—measured with all religious, cultural and sociological indicators—historical Protestantism is rapidly crumbling in these countries.

[1]For the full text of Archbishop Hammer and Bishop Obare's letters see <http://brogren.nu/eng/index.htm>.

The reason to resort to this kind of extreme disciplinary measures seems not to be in the first place biblical and confessional but political. Yet, as the example of Dr. Martin Luther shows before the emperor at Worms, and the crystal clear teachings of the Lutheran Confessions univocally confirm, the sole valid source of authority to discipline someone in the church by divine right (*iure divino*) is the word of God. Everything else falls into a category of adiaphora by human right (*iure humane*). My dear Brother and illustrious Colleague in the office of the ministry, where are these legitimate divine statutes in the Church of Sweden? Or are we witnessing, as I fear with many other Lutheran colleagues, the rise of a secular, intolerant, bureaucratic fundamentalism inimical to the word of God and familiar from various church struggles against totalitarian ideologies during the 20th century? It is a well-known fact that the reason of the denial of ordination is the refusal of these men to acknowledge and comply with a novelty concerning the divinely instituted office of the ministry, namely the ordination of women. Yet, the Holy Scriptures as well as the majority of the Christians do share the same biblical faith with these men, and the Christian of the rank and the file behind them. Ordination of women to the Apostolic Office of the Ministry is a novelty known historically solely from various Gnostic heretic churches, not from the Catholic Orthodox Early Church as the Swedish theologian of universal acclaim, the Bishop of Lund, Prof. Dr. Anders Nygren, pointed out in Sweden in 1958. This Gnostic novelty is now obviously claiming not only autocracy in the church, but also tyranny, since it cannot tolerate even minimal co-existence with classical Christianity, especially set forth in the Lutheran Confessions.

My purpose is, by no means, to instruct you in these matters, which you should know much better, but only to motivate my writing to you. Today we know far better than before that the ordination of women is not an isolated question of gender and equality in the church. It is intimately connected to the Holy Scriptures, to theology and anthropology.

Failure to obey the word of our Omnipotent Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 14:33b-38 et passim) in this question has flung the floodgates wide open for God and to classic Christianity. You might remember our serious exchange of words concerning the advocacy of homosexuality on the platform of the 10th General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Winnipeg last year 2003. We know how this kind of debate has shaken the Anglican Communion and where the African and Asian churches stand.

It is very hard and painful to me to imagine how any conscientious Church leadership could stand against the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions even though political authorities and media princes of various descriptions would temporarily be in support or threaten them. All example of the Church history should warn us from following this biblical faith in Scandinavian countries during popular Lutheran revivals in the 19th century,

we should have left this kind of Erastianism and compulsed conformism behind us a long time ago. Furthermore, your church should be in a better position than those of Denmark and Norway, since you have finally shaken away the burdens of a state church: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in Princes," Psalm 118:8-9.

The Lutheran doctrine in the confessional books and Dr. Martin Luther's writing is very clear, indeed, at this point. Where ecclesiastical authorities dare the ordination with reasons that are not legitimate in the light of the Word of God, this kind of denial is canonically not valid. It only gives the right of reforming the church (*ius reformandi*) and the right of ordaining (*ius ordinandi*) to those who are ready to obey God's Word rather than men.

For this reason, I write this serious and cordial appeal to you, my most Reverend and Illustrious Colleague! Because of Christian love I do this in deepest humility. However, demanded by the biblical and Lutheran truth, I want to be as straight forward and candid as necessary. Hence, I ask you to do what must be considered as an absolute minimum in a church, namely to protect those who faithfully obey the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions for Christ. I earnestly appeal to you, that you would remove all the obstacles imposed on the above mentioned ordinations and to do this with your own example as an ordaining Bishop and as true Shepherd and Courageous Primate of your Church.

Otherwise, I must with other Lutheran bishops take upon myself the heavy and historic burden to heed the call of oppressed Lutheranism in your Church and to ordain bishops and pastors in the Church of Sweden on the basis of emergency legitimacy set forth in the Lutheran Confessions. As Lutherans we must also understand that this kind of calling comes from the Head of the Church himself. Who dares disobey him?

Looking anxiously forward to receiving your positive answer

Walter Obare Omwanza
The Most Reverend Bishop Of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya

Timothy C. J. Quill

Antinomian Aversion to Sanctification?

An emerited brother writes that he is disturbed by a kind of preaching that avoids sanctification and "seemingly question(s) the Formula of Concord . . . about the Third Use of the Law." The odd thing is that this attitude, he writes, is found among would-be confessional pastors, even though it is really akin to the antinomianism of "Seminex"! He asks: "How can one read the Scriptures over and over and not see how much and how often our Lord (in the Gospels) and the

Apostles (in the Epistles) call for Christian sanctification, crucifying the flesh, putting down the old man and putting on the new man, abounding in the work of the Lord, provoking to love and good works, being fruitful . . .?"

I really have no idea where the anti-sanctification bias comes from. Perhaps it is a knee-jerk over-reaction to "Evangelicalism": since they stress practical guidance for daily living, we should not! Should we not rather give even more and better practical guidance, just because we distinguish clearly between Law and Gospel? Especially given our anti-sacramental environment, it is of course highly necessary to stress the holy means of grace in our preaching. But we must beware of creating a kind of clericalist caricature that gives the impression that the whole point of the Christian life is to be constantly taking in preaching, absolution, and Holy Communion—while ordinary daily life and callings are just humdrum time-fillers in-between! That would be like saying that we live to eat, rather than eating to live. The real point of our constant feeding, by faith, on the Bread of Life, is that we might gain an ever-firmer hold of Heaven—and meanwhile become ever more useful on earth! We have, after all, been "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Cars, too, are not made to be fueled and oiled forever at service-stations. Rather, they are serviced in order that they might yield useful mileage in getting us where we need to go. Real good works before God are not showy, sanctimonious pomp and circumstance, or liturgical falderal in church, but, for example, "when a poor servant girl takes care of a little child or faithfully does what she is told" (*Large Catechism*, Ten Commandments, paragraph 314, Kolb-Wengert, page 428).

The royal priesthood of believers need to recover their sense of joy and high privilege in their daily service to God (1 Pet. 2:9). The "living sacrifice" of bodies, according to their various callings, is the Christians' "reasonable service" or God-pleasing worship, to which St. Paul exhorts the Romans "by the mercies of God" (Rom. 12:1), which he had set out so forcefully in the preceding eleven chapters! Or, as St. James puts it: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (1:27). Liberal churches tend to stress the one, and conservative ones the other, but the Lord would have us do both!

Antinomianism appeals particularly to the Lutheran flesh. But it cannot claim the great Reformer as patron. On the contrary, he writes:

> That is what my Antinomians, too, are doing today, who are preaching beautifully and (as I cannot but think) with real sincerity about Christ's grace, about the forgiveness of sin and whatever else can be said about the doctrine of redemption. But they flee as if it were the very devil the consequence that they should tell the people about the third article, of sanctification, that is, of the new life in Christ. They think one should not frighten or trouble the people, but rather always preach comfortingly about grace and the forgiveness of sins in Christ, and under no circumstances use

> these or similar words, "Listen! You want to be a Christian and at the same time remain an adulterer, a whoremonger, a drunken swine, arrogant, covetous, a usurer, envious, vindictive, malicious, etc.!" Instead they say, "Listen! Though you are an adulterer, a whoremonger, a miser, or other kind of sinner, if you but believe, you are saved, and you need not fear the law. Christ has fulfilled it all! . . .
>
> They may be fine Easter preachers, but they are very poor Pentecost preachers, for they do not preach . . . "about the sanctification by the Holy Spirit," but solely about the redemption of Jesus Christ, although Christ (whom they extol so highly, and rightly so) is Christ, that is, He has purchased redemption from sin and death so that the Holy Spirit might transform us out of the old Adam into new men . . . Christ did not earn only *gratia*, "grace," for us, but also *donum*, "the gift of the Holy Spirit," so that we might have not only forgiveness of, but also cessation of, sin. Now he who does not abstain from sin, but persists in his evil life, must have a different Christ, that of the Antinomians; the real Christ is not there, even if all the angels would cry, "Christ! Christ!" He must be damned with this, his new Christ ("On The Councils And The Church," *Luther's Works* 41:113-114).

What are the "practical and clear sermons," which, according to the *Apology*, "hold an audience" (XXIV,50, p. 267)? *Apology* XV, 42-44 (p. 229) explains:

> . . . the chief worship of God is to preach the Gospel. . . . in our churches all the sermons deal with topics like these: repentance, fear of God, faith in Christ, the righteousness of faith, prayer . . . the cross, respect for the magistrates and all civil orders, the distinction between the kingdom of Christ (the spiritual kingdom) and political affairs, marriage, the education and instruction of children, chastity, and all the works of love.

"Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, unto Thy Church Thy Holy Spirit, and the wisdom which cometh down from above, that Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve Thee, and in the confession of Thy Name abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen."

Kurt Marquart

Indices to Volume 67 (2003)

Articles

(TO) indicates a "Theological Observer" article.

Book Reviews

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