

Trinity Seminar

The Father

First Words (i.e., Prolegomena):

- The Gloria Patria (“Glory be to the Father [or, colloquially, “Glory Be])...
 - “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning and now, and ad ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”
- Why even study the Trinity?
 - “For what makes Christianity absolutely distinct is the identity of our God. *Which* God we worship: *that* is the article of faith that stands before all others. The bedrock of our faith is nothing less than God himself, and every aspect of the gospel – creation, revelation, salvation – is only Christian insofar as it is the creation, revelation and salvation of *this* God, the triune God.”¹
- Providing a theological grammar:
 - In order to speak well about any given topic, we need to have a working grammar before us. We need to know how words work and function within the context that we are speaking. When it comes to talking about the doctrine of the Trinity, saints who have gone before us have prepared a grammar, developed from biblical revelation, for us to use at the cost of their own lives. This grammar keeps us from falling into the ditches of heresy, and allows us to speak intelligibly and truly, although not comprehensively, about our triune God. When we neglect the study of such a theological grammar, we do so to our own spiritual harm.
- A couple points that need to be consistently affirmed throughout:
 - We believe in one true and living God (affirmation of biblical monotheism).
 - “The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.”²
 - This one true and living God eternally subsists as three distinct persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (affirmation of Christian Trinitarianism).
 - “In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.”³

¹ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 155 (Kindle edition).

² *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, 2.1. The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (2LBCF) provides the following passages of Scripture in confirmation: 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Deut. 6:4; Jer. 10:10; Isa. 48:12; Exod. 3:14; John 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; Deut. 4:15; Mal. 3:6; 1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23; Psalms 90:2; Gen. 17:1; Isa. 6:3; Psalms 115:3; Isa. 46:10; Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36; Exod. 34:6, 7; Heb. 11:6; Neh. 9:32, 33; Psalms 5:5, 6; Nah. 1:2, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.3. The 2LBCF provides the following passages of Scripture in confirmation: 1 John 5:7; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Exod. 3:14; John 14:11; 1 Cor. 8:6; John 1:14, 18; John 15:26; Gal. 4:6. In considering the one shared undivided essence amongst the three persons of the Godhead, it seems appropriate to note, “All of this provides the basis for the ancient doctrine of *perichoresis* – the interpenetration and

- The first use of the word “trinity” is found in the writings of Tertullian, an ancient church father from Carthage, who lived c. AD 155-240.
- Trinity simply means the “threeness” of the one true and living God; so, when we speak of triunity, what we are implying is the unity of the three and the threeness of the one.⁴
 - What do we mean when we say that God is both one and three? Isn’t that a logical contradiction; an illogical statement?
 - When we say that God is one and three, we are saying that he is one in essence or being, and three in persons.
 - There is no logical contradiction in that statement, as the law of non-contradiction has not been violated (e.g., something is one in A and three in A at the same time and in the same way).
 - There would be a logical contradiction if we had said that God is one in essence and three in essence, or one in persons and three in persons.
- What do we mean when we say “essence”?
 - Francis Turretin (AD 1627-1687) defines essence as that which, “denotes the whatness (*quidditatem*) of a thing and is often met with in Scripture, not only in the concrete when God is called [I AM] (Ex. 3:14; Rev. 1:4), but also in the abstract when deity... nature... divine nature... is attributed to God.”⁵
 - Herman Bavinck (AD 1854-1921) is quite helpful here in helping us understand the difference between creaturely essence and divine essence when he says, “The concept of the nature of humans is a generic concept... Human nature as it exists in different people is never totally and quantitatively the same. For that reason people are not only distinct but also separate. In God all this is different... [The divine nature] exists *in* the divine persons and is totally and quantitatively the same in each person. The persons, though distinct, are not separate. They are the same in essence, one in essence, and the same being... It is one and the same divine nature that exists in each person individually and in all of them collectively. Consequently, there is in God but one eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient being, having one mind, one will, and one power.”⁶
- What do we mean when we say “persons”?
 - Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) has said, “Yet when you ask ‘Three what?’ human speech labors under a great dearth of words. So we say three persons, not in order to say that precisely, but in order not to be reduced to silence.”⁷
 - Boethius (c. AD 480-525), a philosopher of the early sixth century, declared that a person should be defined as, “the individual substance of a rational nature.”⁸
 - Scott Swain, in quoting Thomas Aquinas, says, “Drawing on Boethius’s venerable definition, Thomas argues that because ‘person’ refers to a particular individual, that is, to that which *distinguishes* ‘this one’ from ‘that one’ within a common classification of nature, ‘person’ must apply in God’s case ‘relationshipwise’ because it is the *relations of origin* that distinguish the three from one another.”⁹

communion of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in, with, and through each other [cf. John 17:21].” (Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on Their Way* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 275) Horton goes on to note the dangers of allowing the doctrine of perichoresis to degenerate into social trinitarianism (Ibid., 296-299).

⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus says of this unity of the three, “a unity worshiped in Trinity and a Trinity summed up into unity.” (Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Five Theological Orations*, 6.22)

⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992), 1:253.

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 2:300.

⁷ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity: De Trinitate* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1991), 197.

⁸ Boethius, “Contra Eutychen et Nestorium” in *The Theological Tractates* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 34.

⁹ Scott R. Swain, “Divine Trinity” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 98. Swain discusses the Augustinian differences between substantial predication and relational predication, saying, “these two categories of predication allow us to observe real distinctions between the three while maintaining their unity as one God: considered in relation to the Son and the Spirit, the Father is really and truly distinct; considered in himself, the Father is simply the one true God; and so forth.” (95-96)

- John Calvin has said regarding the use of “person” language, “But laying aside disputation over terms, I shall proceed to speak of the thing itself: ‘Person,’ therefore, I call a ‘subsistence’ in God’s essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality.”¹⁰
- In summarizing what has just been said regarding divine Persons, Richard Muller offers up the following:
 - “A divine person, then, can be identified as ‘an incommunicable subsistence of the divine essence,’ granting that the divine essence is possessed in common by the three persons, while the persons represent incommunicable characteristics: Father, Son and Spirit are God, but the Father is not the Son, the Son not the Spirit, and so forth...”¹¹
- With the concept of person now before us, it’s important to note that this analogical use of “persons” also helps us to see that while humanity is uni-personal (i.e., one person subsisting in one being), God is tri-personal (i.e., three persons subsisting in one being [or three subsistences in one being]), and is so eternally and necessarily.¹²
 - Louis Berkhoff is helpful here, as it concerns the way we speak about the personality of God, when he says, “In view of the fact that there are three persons in God, it is better to say that God is personal than to speak of Him as a Person.”¹³

Biblical Testimony:

- The reality of the doctrine of the Trinity is something that comes from special revelation and not from general revelation *per se* (i.e., by itself), as this trinitarian reality is an *ad intra* reality (i.e., a reality considered from within) which must be self-revealed by God and received by faith.
 - We might also say that it is not until the coming of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit that the revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is brought out of the dimly lit storehouse of the Old Testament and into the light of the New Testament revelation.¹⁴
- Affirmation of the biblical doctrine of monotheism:
 - Old Testament witness:
 - Deut. 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”¹⁵
 - It is important to note here that, “YHWH as God’s personal name refers to the divine Godhead in its fullness, the divine essence equally shared by the three persons. As such, YHWH can be predicated on any of the divine persons without remainder. And at the same time, the name YHWH is not the sole possession/indicator of any one person. YHWH is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their coequal sharing of the divine essence in its fulness.”¹⁶
 - Deut. 32:39, “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 1:128.

¹¹ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* [PRRD]: *The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:182.

¹² Language can be used univocally, equivocally, and analogically. In the case of analogical language, we are expressing the reality that a word may be used to describe two different things, changing its meaning proportionately, but not completely. In using language analogically, we understand that there is a level of similarity and dissimilarity. For an excellent treatment on the use of analogical language as it relates to God’s self-revelation, see Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* (1.1.Q.13.A.5). Cf. Michael S. Horton, *Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method*, JETS 45/2 [June 2002], 317-41; Peter Sanlon, *Simply God: Recovering the classical Trinity* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 388-500 (Kindle edition).

¹³ Louis Berkhoff, *Systematic Theology* (Louisville: GLH Publishing), 60 (Kindle edition).

¹⁴ Cf. B. B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

¹⁵ All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway), 2011 text edition.

¹⁶ Mark S. Gignilliat, “The Trinity and the Old Testament: Real Presence or Imposition?” in *The Essential Trinity: New Testament Foundations and Practical Relevance*, ed. Bandon D. Crowe & Carl R. Trueman (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2017), 207 (Kindle edition). Gignilliat rightly notes that one danger of “identifying YHWH as the divine essence is the introduction of the fourth member into the Trinity, to wit, the essence as an independent transcendent agent.” (Ibid., 210) This one true and living God, in the one undivided essence, is eternally tripersonal.

- Isa. 44:8, “Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”
 - Isa. 45:5-6, 21c-22, “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God: I equip, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other... Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, the righteous God and Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”
 - New Testament witness:
 - Rom. 3:29-30, “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one – who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”
 - 1 Tim. 1:17, “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”
 - James 2:19, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!”
- Affirmation of the plurality/triunity of this one true and living God:
 - “The Old Testament conveys only an inexplicit indication of God’s Trinitarian existence: it is [the first part of] the record of the gradually unfolding doctrine of the Trinity. Still, the Old Testament contains – not just in a few isolated texts but especially in the organism of its revelation as a whole – components for the doctrine of the Trinity.”¹⁷
 - “Though the revelation of God’s tripersonal nature is primarily a New Testament phenomenon, the roots of that revelation may be found in the Old Testament by those ‘already acquainted with the doctrine of the Trinity.’”¹⁸
 - Old Testament adumbrations (i.e., to foreshadow vaguely):¹⁹
 - Gen. 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” (cf. Gen. 3:22; 11:6, 7; Isa. 6:8)
 - Ps. 33:6, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”
 - Isa. 48:14-16, “Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken and called him; I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.’ And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.”
 - Isa. 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;” (cf. Luke 4:16-21)²⁰

¹⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:261.

¹⁸ Swain, “Divine Trinity”, 91.

¹⁹ Fred Sanders, in quoting Geerhardus Vos (Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin [Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2012-2014], 38-41), mentions nine “traces of the doctrine of the Trinity,” which can be thus discovered in the Old Testament: (1) The distinction between the names of Elohim and Yahweh, (2) The plural form of this name Elohim, (3) The concept of the angel of the Lord, (4) The concept of wisdom personified, (5) The concept of the Lord’s ‘word’ personified, (6) The doctrine of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament, (7) Old Testament passages in which God speaks of himself in the plural, (8) Old Testament passages where more than one person is expressly named, (9) Passages that speak of three persons (especially the Levitical blessing in Num 6).” (Fred Sanders, *New Studies in Dogmatics: The Triune God*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], 213-214 [Kindle edition])

²⁰ An even more clear testimony to the plurality within the one true and living God can be seen when we compare texts like Ps. 45:6,7 and Ps. 102:25-27 with Heb. 1:8-12. What was once concealed in the Old Testament is revealed in the progressive revelation of the New Testament; this one true and living God has eternally existed in three persons.

- Hos. 1:7, “But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”
 - “The ‘personal names’ of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit identify the distinct manner in which the three relate to one another within the being and activity of the one true God. Because the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Spirit provide the occasion for manifesting the mutual relations of the three ‘east of Eden,’ the grammar of God’s triune name is supremely a matter of New Testament revelation.”²¹
 - New Testament attestations:²²
 - Matt. 3:16-17, “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”
 - Matt. 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”
 - John 1:1-3, 14, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”²³
 - John 6:27, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”
 - John 14:16, 17, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”
 - John 16:7, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”
 - John 17:1, 5, “‘Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you... And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.’”
 - John 20:17, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”
 - 1 Cor. 8:6, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”
 - 1 Cor. 12:4-6, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”
 - 2 Cor. 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

²¹ Swain, “Divine Trinity”, 91.

²² It is important to note here that as we are working through the following New Testament passages, be aware of how often the appellation (i.e., a name or title) “God” is used in reference to the Father in relation to the Son (cf. Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:3 [cited in Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2017], 22]).

²³ When we consider John 1:1-3 in light of Gen. 1:1-2, it becomes apparent that the God who created in Gen. 1:1-2 has eternally existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Father creating through the Son in/by the power of the Holy Spirit. Creation is a triune act of the one true and living God; more on this point will be said below.

- Gal. 4:4-6, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
- Eph. 3:14-17, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”²⁴
- Eph. 4:4-6, “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”
- Jude 20-21, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”
- It’s important to point out that simply because the title “Father” is used throughout Scripture, it would be incorrect to understand every use in a personalized trinitarian fashion (i.e., describing the person of the Father in relation to the Son specifically).²⁵
 - Isa. 9:6, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”²⁶
 - Mal. 2:10, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”²⁷
 - James 1:17, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”²⁸
- “In all of these elements of revelation, of course, Scripture has not yet provided us with a fully developed trinitarian dogma. But it does teach us that the one name of God is only fully unfolded in that of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It very clearly and plainly declares that all God’s outgoing works (*ad extra*), both in creation and re-creation [i.e. redemption], have a threefold divine cause. It leaves no doubt

²⁴ Vos notes on this passage, “Sometimes God is called Father as the origin of all that is created. In this sense one can say that the name refers to the Trinity as a whole and to the Father insofar as within the divine economy the work of creation falls to Him (compare Eph 3:16 [cf. Acts 17:24-25]).” (Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:51)

²⁵ Cf. Berkhoff, *Systematic Theology*, 65 (Kindle edition). Berkhoff describes three ways in which the name “Father” may be applied to the triune God generally: “(1) Sometimes it is applied to the triune God as the origin of all created things... [cf. Ps. 68:5] (2) The name is also ascribed to the triune God to express the theocratic relation in which He stands to Israel as His Old Testament people [cf. Exod. 4:22-23; Deut. 32:6; Ps. 89:26; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal. 1:6; also in relation to the Davidic King; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 28:6]... (3) In the New Testament the name is generally used to designate the triune God as the Father in an ethical sense of all His spiritual children.” Muller helpfully adds, “Given that God is so frequently identified as ‘Father’ in Scripture, distinction must be made between the ‘essential’ and the ‘personal’ use of the terms – as applied either to the Godhead generally or to the Father personally... when the word Father is attributed to God *essentially*, though all creatures are excluded, yet all three Divine persons are included, because they are co-equal, they have one nature, will and worship; they are one and the same God.” (Muller, *PRRD*, 4:246) Cf. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:51-52.

²⁶ Alec Motyer, in commenting on how this son could also be called “Father,” says, “Probably the leading idea in the name *Father* here is that his rule follows the pattern of divine fatherhood.” (J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 102) Gary Smith also notes, “Since fathers were the heads of tribes who wisely led the people, it’s a fitting title for a ruler if one wants to avoid some of the negative connotations of kingship.” (Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39* [Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007], 241 [Kindle edition])

²⁷ Muller says of this passage, “There [is] no reference here to ‘Father’ in the sense of ‘the Father of Christ’ but only to God as the creator and governor of the world – not to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit, who are elsewhere in Scripture identified as creating the world.” (Muller, *PRRD*, 4:246) Cf. John L. Mackay, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: God’s Restored People* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2010), 362; Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 318.

²⁸ Douglas Moo has said regarding the use of “Father” here, “When God is presented as ‘father,’ his creative power is often intended; see, for example, Job 38:28: ‘Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew?’ James, therefore, cites God’s creation of the heavenly bodies as evidence of his power and continuing care for the world.” (Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000], 78) Cf. Alec Motyer, *The Message of James* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 56.

whatever that this threefold cause constitutes three distinct subjects who relate to each other as persons. And so Scripture contains all the data from which theology has constructed the dogma of the Trinity.”²⁹

Christian Dogmatics:³⁰

- “The Church began to formulate its doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century. The Council of Nicea [sic] declared the Son to be co-essential with the Father (AD 325), while the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) asserted the deity of the Holy Spirit, though not with the same precision. As to the interrelation of the three it was officially professed that the Son is generated by the Father, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.”³¹
 - The “co-essentialness” articulated in both the Nicene Creed and the more robust Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed comes from the Greek word *homoousia* (i.e., same substance). This particular word was chosen to combat the growing heresy of Arianism, which argued that the Father and the Son were of similar substances (i.e., *homoiousia*).³²
 - The *Filioque* (and of the Son) clause seems to have been inserted into the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in the sixth century within the Western Church. The Eastern Church universally rejected this addition secondary to their high view of established, orthodox, and ecumenical creedal statements and their binding authority.³³
 - The original Latin phrase from Constantinople was, “*Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem: qui ex Patre procedit qui cum Patre, et Filio simul adoratur, et cum glorificatur.*” (And in the Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life: who proceeds from the Father, and who with the Father and the Son is both worshiped and glorified.)
 - The altered creed reads, “*qui ex Patre Filioque procedit...*” (who proceeds from the Father and the Son...)
 - By and large, the Western Church followed this new reading of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.
- The personal properties of the Father *ad intra* (i.e., considered from within):
 - Bavinck describes these “inward” relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively, as, “‘personal properties’: (1) paternity (‘unbegottenness,’ active generation, and active spiration); (2) filiation or sonship, passive generation, active spiration; (3) procession or passive spiration.” He goes on to say, “The first person is the Father, and his personal attribute [property] is his fatherhood or his ‘unbegottenness’... The church fathers at the same time pointed out that the attribute [unbegottenness] pertains to the person, not the being. God’s being is the same in all three persons, but [unbegottenness] is a relation within the being... The name ‘Father,’ accordingly, is to be preferred over the term [unbegotten].”³⁴ This has also been described, historically, as relations of origin.
 - In relation to the Son:

²⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:279.

³⁰ The understanding of “dogmatics” presumed here is the study of early Christian dogma established within the first several centuries of church history, especially as it relates to the ecumenical Councils and subsequently formed Creeds.

³¹ Berkhoff, *Systematic Theology*, 58 (Kindle edition).

³² Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2016), 417.

³³ Horton notes that, “The suspicion of a ‘binitarian’ tendency in Western Trinitarianism had already been exacerbated centuries earlier, at the Third Council of Toledo (589), when the West unilaterally altered the Nicene Creed’s statement of the Spirit’s procession ‘from the Father’ by adding, ‘and from the Son’ (*ex patre filioque*). Hence, the disagreement about this phrase is called the *filioque* controversy...” (Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 284)

³⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:305, 307. Cr. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:252-255. Swain is helpful here as well when he says, “*Paternity* is the Father’s personal property because he and he alone is father *to* the Son. *Filiation* or *generation* is the Son’s personal property because he and he alone is [S]on of the Father. *Procession* is the Spirit’s personal property because he and he alone proceeds *from* the Father and the Son... God exists essentially and actually as God *the Father* of the Son, as God *the Son* of the Father, and as God *the Holy Spirit* who proceeds from them both; God has no concrete existence apart from his threefold subsistence as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... God is three persons all the way down.” (Swain, “Divine Trinity”, 98-99)

- “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...”³⁵
 - Has the Father always been the Father? Yes, the Father has eternally existed as the Father of the Son, who is eternally begotten of the Father. Even before the creation of the world or the setting apart of a particular people who would experience the blessings of the one true and living God, this was so.³⁶
 - John 1:14, 18, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”³⁷
 - In relation to the Holy Spirit:
 - “And I believe in the Holy Ghost... who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]...”³⁸
 - John 15:26, “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”
- The personal works of the Father *ad extra* (i.e., considered from without):
 - In relation to creation:³⁹
 - “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God... by whom all things were made... And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life...”⁴⁰
 - 1 Cor. 8:6, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”
 - Eph. 3:8-9, “To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things...”⁴¹
 - In relation to the economy (i.e., the ordering or arrangement of operations) of salvation:⁴²
 - Matt. 3:16-17, “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending

³⁵ *The Nicene Creed*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (<https://www.ccel.org/creeds/nicene.creed.html>), accessed on January 25, 2019. Remember, this is an eternal begottenness.

³⁶ Does this eternal begottenness of the Son diminish the deity of the Son? Swain answers in the negative when he says, “The majority of theologians in the Reformed tradition argue that the aseity of the Son is consistent with the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. The consistency between these two aspects of the Son’s person lies in properly distinguishing the Son’s *being* (that which the Son holds in *common* with the Father and the Spirit) from his *mode of being* (that which *distinguishes* the Son from the Father and the Spirit). Because he is ‘equal with God’ *in being* (John 5:19), the Son has ‘life in himself’ just ‘as the Father has life in himself’ (John 5:26). Because he is distinct from the Father *in his mode of being*, the Son has ‘life in himself’ as something eternally ‘granted’ or communicated to him by the Father (John 5:26). For these theologians, it is precisely the Son’s *distinct mode of being* as one eternally begotten of the Father that accounts for his *being consubstantial* with the Father.” (Scott R. Swain, “B. B. Warfield and the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity” in *Themelios*, 43.1 [2018]: 17)

³⁷ While the ESV translates the Greek word *monogenes* as “only” in both of these verses, the New American Standard Bible (The Lockman Foundation, 1977 [NASB]) rightly keeps the translation as “only begotten”. For a thorough defense of translating *monogenes* as “only begotten”, see Charles Lee Iron’s, “A Lexical Defense of the Johannine ‘Only Begotten’” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation (Retrieving Eternal Generation)*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017]. Iron’s notes, “The two processions – the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit – are an essential component of Trinitarian orthodoxy. They function as the linchpin for maintaining the distinction among the three persons without compromising the unity and simplicity of God.” (Ibid., 98 [Kindle edition])

³⁸ *The Nicene Creed*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Remember, this is an eternal procession.

³⁹ Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:270-271.

⁴⁰ *The Nicene Creed*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

⁴¹ R. C. Sproul has noted regarding this passage, “In many places, Scripture attributes the work of creation particularly to the Father (see Eph. 3:9, for instance). However, the references to all three persons of the Holy Trinity and Their involvement in creation show us that while the work of creation may reveal the Father in particular, creation is something all three persons do in common.” (R. C. Sproul, “The Trinity and Creation”, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/trinity-and-creation/>, accessed on January 29, 2019)

⁴² Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:271-274.

like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”⁴³

- John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
- Eph. 1:3-14, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of you salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”
- Col. 1:2, 12-14, “To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
- In relation to the Son and the Spirit:
 - In all of the external works of God (i.e., *opera ad extra*), we must not fall into the trap of thinking that the individual persons of the Trinity are working independently. Muller helpfully summarizes what has come to be called the doctrine of inseparable operations when he says, “The work of creation, the incarnation, and the redemption of humanity in regeneration and sanctification serve as significant illustrations of the basic principle that the *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* [operations of the Trinity from without are indivisible], but also, in coordination with that basic principle, they also serve to illustrate the association of certain works of God with individual persons of the Trinity... It would be as erroneous to assign creation purely to the Father as it would be to assign incarnation purely to the Son and the work of regeneration and sanctification purely to the Spirit.”⁴⁴

Heresies and Deficient Trinitarianism:

- Historical heresies that involve the person of the Father (in relation to the Son and the Holy Spirit):
 - Monarchianism and its various aberrations, in an attempt to maintain the unity of God and avoid the charge of tritheism, “viewed God as an invisible monad (i.e., Monarch) without any personal distinctions.”⁴⁵

⁴³ This passage signals the inauguration of the earthy ministry of Jesus Christ as Redeemer. Turretin says of this passage, “[The persons] also differ in terms as often as any divine operation is terminated on any person. So the voice heard from heaven is terminated on the Father, incarnation on the Son and the appearance in the form of a dove on the Holy Spirit.” (Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1:282)

⁴⁴ Muler, *PRRD*, 4:270. Swain helpfully explains how, “God’s triune identity informs our understanding of God’s triune action in two areas, both of which specify in different ways how the three persons relate to one another within the context of their indivisible activity toward creatures... (1) *The doctrine of appropriations...* (2) *[T]he doctrine of divine missions.* (Swain, “Divine Trinity”, 103-104)

⁴⁵ Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology: Volume One – Knowing Ultimate and the Living God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 252.

- “They ascribed to the Father a certain pre-eminence over the other persons, *in order, dignity, and power.*”⁵¹
 - Modern forms of EFS, ERAS, ESS, etc.
 - A well-known proponent of such teaching has been Bruce Ware.
 - Ware has said, “The Father is supreme over all, and in particular, he is supreme within the Godhead as the highest in authority and the one deserving of ultimate praise. Here... Scripture indicates the supremacy of the Father within the very Godhead itself.”⁵²
 - Problems with non-essential subordinationism:⁵³
 - It confuses substantial and relational predication (i.e., the affirmation of something about another).
 - When speaking of divine authority, we are speaking “substancewise” (i.e., substantial predication). To speak of differing levels of authority, therefore, is to speak of differing ontologies (cf. Rev. 4-5). This also disrupts the classical Christian doctrine of divine simplicity.
 - It redefines the character of the relations between the persons.
 - Instead of seeing the personal relation as that of eternal begetting (from the Father) and eternal spiration (from the Father and the Son), now the relations are one of command and obedience. This is problematic because it introduces division into the one simple will of God.
 - It compromises the simple unity and supreme dignity of the persons.
 - A theology that would make it hard for us to proclaim the majesty of the one name shared equally and fully by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one that we should reject.
- Incarnational Sonship
 - This deficient trinitarianism argues that while the second person of the Trinity has eternally existed, he has eternally existed as the Word (i.e., the divine *Logos*) and only temporally as the Son at the incarnation.
 - There are similarities between this view and the Adoptionistic Monarchianism described above, but it should be pointed out that the Incarnational Sonship view does *not* reject the personal reality of the eternal Word and does not argue that there is a personal difference between the Word and the Son (i.e., the eternal Word took on humanity, at which time he entered into the “office” of Son).
 - A modern pastor and theologian who once advocated for this view (and does so no longer) is John MacArthur, who has said, “In both instances [a 1983 commentary on Hebrews and a 1991 booklet ‘The Sonship of Christ’] I reemphasized my unqualified and unequivocal commitment to the biblical truth that Jesus is eternally God. The ‘incarnational sonship’ view, while admittedly a minority opinion, is by no means rank heresy. The heart of my defense of the view consisted of statements that affirmed as clearly as possible my absolute commitment to the evangelical essentials of Christ’s deity and eternity.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Louisville: GLH Publishing), 8491 (Kindle edition).

⁵² Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, & Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 51. It should be noted that this same type of non-essential eternal subordination can be found in many Evangelical writers today.

⁵³ The listed problems came from Scott Swain’s class, *ST515: Scripture, Theology Proper, Anthropology* (Doctrine of God: The Trinity Part 2), offered through Reformed Theological Seminary Course Lectures.

⁵⁴ John MacArthur, “Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ” in *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 6.1 (Spring 2001): 22. MacArthur goes on to say, “I therefore affirm the doctrine of Christ’s eternal sonship while acknowledging it as a mystery into which we should not expect to pry too deeply.” (Ibid., 23) Another influential writer of the 20th century, Walter Martin, also argued for the incarnational sonship of the eternal Word (Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* [Minneapolis: Bethany House Press, 1997], 169-170).

- What are the implications of this deficient trinitarianism as it relates to the personal properties of the Father and the Son *ad intra* and the undivided works *ad extra*?

Various Helpful Quotes:

- On the Father being the “first” person of the Trinity:
 - “The first person of the Trinity is God the Father. He is called the first person, in respect of *order*, not *dignity*: for God the Father has no essential perfection which the other persons have not; he is not more wise, more holy, more powerful than the other persons are.”⁵⁵
- On the use of analogies to explain the Trinity:
 - “Whatever proofs of it some are wont to adduce from nature and reason... yet they cannot convince and obtain the force of solid proof... Thus they ought to be proposed soberly and cautiously, not for the purpose of convincing adversaries, but for confirming believers and showing them the credibility at least of this great mystery.”⁵⁶
- The wonder of delighting in the Trinity:
 - “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.”⁵⁷
- The importance of understanding the relations of origin:
 - “The relations of origin constitute the ‘whence’ of the divine missions, the latter being the temporal embassy and extension of the former. The relations of origin also constitute the ‘whither’ of the divine missions insofar as they provide the divine exemplars and goals of those missions: the goal of the Son’s redemptive mission is to make *us* sons and daughters in order that *he* might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom. 8:29, Gal. 4:5); the goal of the Spirit’s sanctifying mission is to embrace *us* within the fellowship of the Father and the Son, pouring out the Father’s love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and awakening within us the Son’s filial cry of “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6).”⁵⁸
 - What about that stubborn eternal generation?
 - “However, the Father’s identity as fontal source of the Son and the Spirit is not (even logically) *prior* to the existence of the Son and the Spirit but is rather constituted *by* his eternal relations to the Son and the Spirit. ‘The original plentitude of the Father is not a potentiality of the divine essence that would find some kind of partial actuation through the generation of the Son and in the procession of the Spirit. The plentitude and fruitfulness of the Father are perfectly actualized and are entirely manifested in these two eternal acts of the Father.’ For this reason, we **cannot** ascribe any priority to the Father in relation to the Son and the Spirit in terms of either being or hierarchy.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 109.

⁵⁶ Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1:266.

⁵⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oration 40: On Holy Baptism” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, ed. Philip Shcaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature, 1893), 7:375; cited from Jones, *God Is*, 21-22.

⁵⁸ Swain, “Divine Trinity”, 104.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-100.