A Few Philosophical and Biblical Theology Problems
With Statements of the Trinity

A few years ago I was in Jerusalem's Old City visiting bookstores and seeing the sights when a book in a window caught my eye. The title was *You Can Take Jesus, I'll Take God*. It was a radical Jewish apologetic for orthodox Judaism against Christianity. As I read the book and other apologetic works by Jews and Muslims, one of the most emphasized areas they hammer Christianity on is in the coherence of the doctrine of the trinity. Most of their critique is accurate; Christians do not often describe the Trinity very well. In fact, I have heard statements trained professionals make that often have contradictions and incoherences within them. If a statement of the trinity is contradictory it is not worthy to be believed. We should make sure we understand and worship a God, whose concept is free of contradictions, for God is certainly not contradictory.

Trinity Defined

The traditional orthodox trinitarianism of the Christian church from earliest Fathers, medieval theologians, reformers and evangelicals maintains that God is one essence consisting of three coequal persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The one divine essence or being or nature or substance is defined by the whole set of essential properties or attributes. Aquinas underscored that such essence has to do with What God is. Each persons is a distinct subsistence or (following Athanasius) a distinct hypostasis. Charles Hodge defines person as an

intelligent subject who can say "I" about itself and "Thou" to the other members of the trinity. Aquinas emphasizes "person" has to do with Who God is in relationship to the divine essence. I define "person" as *an instantiation of a spiritual nature as a moral end in itself in relationship to others*. This definition captures that the person (who) is identified with the divine nature (what) but does not exhaust the divine nature (there are other divine persons). This definition also recognizes that each person (who) of God is to be appropriately worshipped, glorified and served as God. Furthermore, this definition recognizes that each divine person is in an eternal equal relationship with each of the other divine persons even if those relationships economically (ministries of the Godhead) are reflected in ways that show economic subordination (modes of operation) while maintaining ontological (the being of the Godhead itself as it is) equality. The trinity thus has three persons (who's) in the one divine nature (what).

Early in the second century the *Letter of Barnabas* (2:9; 5:5; 6:14; 7:2; 12:2, 8; 19:7) affirms God is composed of Father, Christ the preexistent Lord and Judge, and the Holy Spirit. *Didache* 7:1 indicates this idea of trinitarian nature was the Christian norm. Theophilus (*To Antolychus* 2:15) coins the term *trias* to connote Father, Logos, and wisdom. Against the Gnostics, Irenaeus argues that one Creator and Redeemer God subsists as Father, Son and Spirit. The Ebionite (or contemporary Unitarian) concern was to preserve the one nature of God as king so the Logos is diminished to exist in God the Father as human reason exists in man. This Logos operative in the man Jesus adopted and deified Christ at his baptism. Such dynamic monarchianism derives the persons and the equality of the persons for the Holy Spirit is merely an impersonal attribute of the Godhead. Arius (or Socinians or English deists and contemporary Jehovah's Witnesses) move the adoption of the Son to a creation of the Son as a created god, the greatest of all creation. In a related view, Harnack identified Sabellious' attempt to preserve the one divine nature as modalistic monarchianism: one divine person acting out three subsequent roles, implying that the Father suffers the passion as

he acts out the role of the Son. Tertullian coins the term *trinitas* to describe the one God (Father) unified in essence or substance (*substantia*) and with three distinct divine persons (*personae*)[1] stoically proceeding (*essential extentia*) from the Father as Son and Spirit. Tertullian saw Christ, however, subordinated as impersonal reason becoming a person at creation and the Spirit was seen as stoic ethereal matter grounding the whole creation. Origen maintained a trinity with one God who is primarily the Father revealing Himself through the stoic Logos concept God's Image. The platonically eternally begotten Logos, who is personal and co-eternal with the Father forms a unity with Jesus' humanity by overwhelming Jesus' neoplatonic human spirit and soul. Origen sometimes calls the Son second God, but together the Father and the Son eternally create the Holy Spirit to work among believers. The Son and Spirit are in degrees divine, possessing in a derived way all the characteristics of deity, and cooperate with the Father to mediate the divine life flowing from Him. Eusebius of Caesarea clarifies that both the first God and the second God (Logos) maintain the same substance (hypostasis), like a fountain bubbles over with its nature, leaving Jesus' flesh passive.

Athanasias is the first to clearly defend the eternal equality of the three persons in the one divine nature. The Councils of Nicea (325 AD), Rome (341 AD), Sardia (343 AD) and Nicene Creed (381 AD) reflect this understanding.

> We believe in one God, the Father Almighty . . . and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. . . . And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father. Together with the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified (Nicene Creed).

At Nicaea *hypostasis* "entity" and *oysia* "existent" were identical while the Latin fathers see *substantia* and *oysia* as equivalent attributal descriptions of God.

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[1] *Against Praceus*, 2, 5-7, 8 *Apology* 21.

Athanasius held that the Son was begotten by internal necessary, eternal generation not as an act of the Sovereign will; thus the Son was co-eternal with the Father. Before Athanasius and the Nicene Creed won the day, a number of councils considered expressions of similar substance (*homoioysios*) and a generation of the Son as by an act of the Father's will (Antioch 341 AD., 344 AD, Philopoplis 342 AD, Synods of Arles and Milan 355 AD). Patristic scholar Christopher Stead in *Divine Substance* (1977) defends that many viewed *homooysios* as the same kind of thing (Aristotelian second substance -- a genus like animal, not a particular like this horse). Others point out *homooysios* as embraced instead of *homoioysios* (which is better understood in this second substance view) argues that *homooysios* has the particular divine nature in view. By the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) *homooysios* is clarified to be a numerical identity as a refutation of Joachim of Fiore's view of its being a collective unity. In addition, Logos Christology as advocated by Athanasius, maintains a unified deity and a unified person of Jesus Christ who expresses solidarity with humanity by overcoming death for all identified with the new man Jesus in His resurrection. This view continued in Monothelitism (the view that Christ only has one will) under the influence of the Aeopagite but lost power when monothelitism was condemned at Constantinople in 681, and then Islam conquered this region. Lombard and Abelard continued to advocate this Logos Christology.

In Nestorian Christology each nature (divine and human) has its appearance (*porsópan*) so that Jesus Christ is divided into appearances of humanity and divinity forming a conjunction rather than a unified person.

The Cappadocian Theologians (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa were concerned that the three *hypostases* might dissolve into a platonically defined *oysia*, so they emphasized their Trinitarian formula as "one divine *oysia* in three distinct *hypostase*." By *oysia* they meant one invisible, divine nature in a simple God and by *hypostasis* they meant mode of being or personal center in social relation to others and unique characteristics. They

distinguished three persons by mutual relations (Father is unbegotten, Son begotten, and Spirit spirited) and by activities (Father as source, Son as agent, and Spirit as consummation of all things). Against accusations that this was tritheism they defended that the persons never operate independently of each other since the same identical energy passes through all three. With regard to the incarnation, the divine nature and human nature interdepend fusing into a third entity. Luther embraced this fused unity of Christ's deity and humanity, providing a foundation for consubstantiation in the sacraments.

Augustine, in his essay *The Trinity* (399 AD and 419 AD), informed by platonism, maintains that each of the three persons (*personae*) possesses the entire essence (*essentia*) and is in so far identical with the essence and with each of the other persons in mutual dependence, interpenetration and indwelling. Thus, the distinction between persons is not substantial but only relational; the whole divine essence belongs to each of them through relational categories generating, generated and proceeding from both Father and Son. *Personae* for Augustine is relational rather than the later view of Descartes (1640) which sees person as the center of conscious self-reflection and self-determination. For Augustine, oneness of essence implies equality of perfections, unity of shared will, and oneness of operations. The three persons "are infinite in themselves. And so each is in each, all are in each, each is in all, all are in all, and all are one."[2] The Son is eternally begotten from the substance of the Father, where the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son (*filioque*).[3] This *filioque* (from the Son) clause was expressly affirmed by Hilary, Augustine, Synod of Toledo (589 AD) and the Athanasian Creed and it became a major factor in the eleventh-century schism between East and West. The Spirit's procession differs from the Son's begetting in that the Spirit "came forth, not as one born but as one given."[4] This

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[2] *The Trinity*, 6.12.12; 5.8.9; 15.5.8; also *Enchidion*, 38; *On Christian Doctrine* 1.5.
[3] *The Trinity*, 15.20.38; 15.17.29; 15.26.47.
[4] *The Trinity*, 5.14.15.

procession becomes understood less in a stoic way and more as a relationship. Furthermore, Augustine and Anselm are rare theologians who claim that the trinity is philosophically necessary within the divine eternal relationship to make sense of the attribute of love; three persons are eternally needed for God to realize the fullness of love: one to love, another to be loved and a third to be the bond of love. This argument continues to be championed by Richard of St. Victor (1173) and Swinburne (1988 and 1994). Anselm in *Why the God-Man* defends that the Son must have been incarnated and only the Son could have become incarnated. That is only one could be generated or else there would be grandsons. The only Son generated took up essential human essence alongside His essential deity.

Within an Augustinian orthodox understanding of trinity, Melito of Sardis first proposed, and the church accepted the proposal at the Chalcedon Council (451 AD) that Jesus Christ possesses both fully divine and fully human natures, within a unified person. Christ's two natures are without mixture, without change, without division and without separation. Aquinas continues this view emphasizing substance (nature defined by whatness) and person (as who) so that this hypostatic union of Christ entails one unified (who) and two natures (whats); deity and humanity. Calvin continues this view with Christ as a unified mediator.

The Protestant confessions articulate a consensus of the church concerning orthodox trinitarianism and Chalcedon Christology. For example, there is broad agreement between Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* (1530) at. I, *The Formula of Concord* (1577) art 12, The Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles* (1563) art I, The Reformed *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566) art. 3, and the *Westminster Confession* (1646) ch. 2. The core of the latter statement reads:

> In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Evangelical theologians have regularly followed this view including: Turretin, Hodge, Shedd, Chafer, Berkhof, Thiessen, Erickson, and many others.

Some significant deviations from this orthodox position will be examined now. Schleiermacher approaches Christology from a phenomenological perspective whereby the noble humanity of Jesus adds divinity by pure expression of dependence upon the god in whom he trusted. To make sense of Philippians 2, kenotic Christology was first proposed by Sartori in 1831, that Christ self-limited His divinity to become unified with His humanity in the incarnation. Hegel proposed that the Trinity represented the dialectical process where Father is Universality (eternal being-in and of itself), the Son is particularization (Being-for another) and the Holy Spirit is individuality (a return from appearance into Self). Hegel also proposed a philosophical argument for the trinity because it is only possible to come to self-consciousness through projection of oneself onto something other than oneself; it was necessary of the Father to have the Son as other than Himself before coming to full self-consciousness to occur in the life of the Holy Spirit. Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel follow Hegel in this argument. Process theology identifies all of God with Father and the primordial nature as either the Son or the Father, the creative thrust with the Son, and the consequent nature as the Spirit. Many liberals and O.T. Biblical theologians identified the Spirit as a mere force extension of the Godhead. For example, Geoffrey Lampe and Maurice Wiles continue to define Spirit in that way. Many conservative evangelicals wishing to identify the Spirit as a legitimate person redefine the concept of person using composite psychology (prominent early in the 20th century) so that a "person" refers to an individual with intellect, emotion and will. Neo-Orthodox theology of Barth and Brunner so emphasize the economic trinity (the ministries of the Godhead) that the ontological trinity is neglected. In the wake of neo-orthodoxy, individuals such as Moltmann have championed social trinitarianism, a view that has entered into evangelicalism as

claiming a continuation of the Cappadocian trinity.[5] In social trinitarianism, "person" is defined in a post-enlightenment way as a self-aware individual. "Nature" is defined in one of two ways. Nature is either 1) the shared set of properties corporately held by the group (no person needs all the attributes as long as they are exhibited in the group) or 2) the shareable set of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for membership in a class of beings. Either way, kenotic Christology is embraced and the divine nature for the incarnate Christ excludes the following traits: necessity, immutability, sovereignty, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence; these traits may be merely excess traits nice for God to have. Colin Gunton has split the difference between the traditional orthodox and the social trinity in framing God talk as of a post-Kantian phenomenological, economic, incomprehensible being in relationship with the concept of person as subsistence in relationship.[6] He modifies his concept of person from the spatial relational one that he used for humans to a person model that would permit the mutual interpenetrating of *perichoisis* as illustrated by the relationship of electricity and magnetism in Faraday's equations. All illustrations break down for trinity and Faraday's equations are no exception. With increased distance from the electrical source the magnetic effect diminishes, such that as a trinity illustration it would call into question the immutable omnipresence of God and divine persons.

Orthodox Trinity Restated

The trinity entails: 1) one God (e.g. Dtr. 6:4; James 2:19) as indicated by one divine nature (What God is identified by, namely divine attributes). This means that while God is greater than our descriptions, our descriptions of God still do describe God as He is. 2) Three coequal persons (Who God is). Precisely

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[5] For a helpful discussion of social and orthodox trinity compared see Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).
[6] Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1997).

put "person" means *an instantiation of a spiritual nature as a moral end in itself, in relationship to others* (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:2-12; Matt. 28:19). The next three points identify that each of these persons is in fact the essential God. 3) The Father is one of those persons of God (e.g. John 6:27; Eph. 4:6). 4) The Son is one of those persons of God (e.g. John 1:1; Heb. 1:8). 5) The Spirit is one of those persons of God (e.g. Acts 5:3-4). This view of trinity is coherent because it is three of one thing (who's) and one of a different thing (what).

This orthodox trinitarianism has implications for the incarnation so that the incarnate Jesus Christ is a unified person who has two complete natures (whats): divine and human. Following Chalcedon these natures are neither mixed, changed, without division nor without separation. Prior to the incarnation, where Christ adds humanity, the Son was only divine. Since the incarnation, both of the Son's natures must be included in any discussion. So that a question such as, "Could the Son sin?" is not fully answered without the following: as God the Son could not sin, as man the Son could have sinned, thus permitting authentic temptation, but as a unified person the Son did not sin. With regard to location: as God the Son is omnipresent, as man the Son is locally present and embodied, and as a unified person, so the Son may then answer from either omnipresence or His local presence with the sense that he is the same "I". With regard to knowledge: as God the Son is omniscient, as man the Son is finite and growing in knowledge to the extent that the Father permits, so as a unified person he may answer from either mind with the same personal referent "I". As such, most of the N.T. discussion of Jesus Christ strongly evidences His humanity (especially in the synoptics) and his unified person, with occasional glimpses of His deity (as He stills a storm or as the writer of Hebrews defends Him as superior to the angels).

This Trinitarian divine essence in relationship is illustrated in Jesus' prayer in John 17. Jesus prays to the Father to glorify the Son, something which would only really be appropriate for God. This glorification in John is identified at Jesus death-ascension event. It opens up the opportunity for Jesus to return

glory to the Father as He has on earth already by completing the task of revealing the Father and providing everlasting life, in which Christ is the object of faith. Neither Father nor Son is kept essentially hidden for Jesus reveals divinity of the Father and Himself in what He says and does. Jesus has maintained a mutually giving relationship with the Father and has included the disciples as beneficiaries of revelation from the Father and Son such that the disciples realized that Jesus was sent from the Father with divine authority so that these disciples became obedient to Them, which further glorifies the Father as well. All the Father has, such as these disciples, are Christ's and all that Christ has is also the Father's. The context in which this prayer is expressed finds Jesus about to leave from being visibly present among the disciples, so He prays that the Father would carry on protecting the disciples in His visible absence of His humanity among them when He visibly leaves. Jesus prays for His disciples throughout every generation so that we would be protected by the Father, set apart by the Father's word, and that our love would emulate that of the Father and the Son for each other. The unity of the love relationship of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father includes an intimacy of knowledge of each for the other and a mutual interpenetrating of each omnipresently throughout the other, which funds the oneness of purpose to love the other immutably from before the creation to beyond glory. This Trinitarian intimate *perichoisis* extends to us as we the disciples are indwelt by all the persons of the Godhead so that we too would intimately know God through His Word and be drawn into an intimate unity of purpose in loving others. This love relationship begins with loving the persons of God Who penetrate us and then extends to loving fellow humans as evidence of the divine love in us, so that they will know that we are Christians by our love.

A Few Problems

From this foundation I would like to examine a few philosophical problems in some Trinitarian models. These entail the following issues: 1) Contradiction fostered by a composite definition of nature and the attribute of simplicity; 2) contradictory definitions of nature and person; 3) contradiction fostered by mutable immutability; and 4) contradiction fostered by eternalizing of temporal processes.

Composite Nature and Simplicity

Many of the models define the nature of God by divine attributes and add the platonized attribute that God is simple. The definition of the nature of God as "divine attributes" identifies that each distinct attribute meaningfully refers to God as He is ontologically. For example, God is divisibly described by a complex of attributes such that He is: immutable, holy, righteous, omnipresent, omniscient, jealous and loving. These diverse attributes and others meaningfully describe God as each of the three persons. Often, appeals to Biblical texts defend that God is accurately described by this diverse list of attributes.[7] At times philosophical arguments are also embraced for God existing as a Maximally Great Being or powerful creator, with a complex of attributes that these concepts entail. Within a context such as this, at times the attribute of simplicity is also embraced of God.[8] Stump[9] defines simplicity as comprising four claims:

1. God cannot have any spatial or temporal parts.

2. God cannot have any intrinsic accidental properties.

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[7] For example, Biblical texts marshaled to defend these attributes include immutable (Jas. 1:17), holy (Isa. 6:3), righteous (Gen. 18:25), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-12), omniscience (Ps. 139:1-18), jealous (Dtr. 5:9) and love (1 John 4:8).

[8] E.g. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. I, Pt. 1, Q3, A7.

[9] Eleonore Stump "Simplicity" in Quinn and Taliaferro *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, p. 250 and Stump and Kretzmann "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2(1985), pp. 353-81.

3. There cannot be any real distinction between one essential property and another in God's nature.

4. There cannot be a real distinction between essence and existence in God.

Claim 1 is a normal conclusion based on the attributes of omnipresence and eternality, such that God is not spread out over space or time. Such a God could interact with every place and time because they are present to God.

Claim 2 presupposes the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic properties, and concludes that the ontological nature of God is immutable. That is, while God may be relationally presented as responding to His creation, God's ontological nature is made up of necessary intrinsic attributes. So God in and of Himself has no changing attributes, even though He relates to the creation in ways of blessing and curse that may appear to be different from our view-point.

Claim 3 identifies that God ontologically and mystically transcends language and description of His attributes, such that these attributes do not have any univocally distinct meaning from each other. Claim 4 is a special instance of this in that essence and existence are not univocally distinguishable either. It is at this level in claims 3 and 4 that a contradiction occurs for any who also claim that God has meaningfully distinct attributes (such as God's goodness and wrath, or God's transcendent holiness and imminence). Such a view of simplicity implies that God's nature is uncompounded, incomplex and indivisible. Ultimately the very affirmation of simplicity denies the complex attributal nature of God, so that there is a real contradiction.[10] God is either described by these attributes or He is not described by these attributes; a theologian gets into real contradiction when he says both. The Bible and philosophical arguments present God as having a nature accurately described by a complex of distinguishable attributes. One has little but

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[10] For a longer defense that this is in fact a contradiction, cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature? (Milwaukee:* Marquette University Press, 1980).

a contradictory tradition following platonic philosophy to also try to maintain the attribute of simplicity. The most reasonable option would be to deny that God is simple with regard to nature. Furthermore, God as three persons in the trinity is a unified complex of persons. So, God is not simple regarding His personhood either; to view God as simple with regard to persons would be an affirmation of Unitarianism against trinity. If God is not simple with regard to nature or person then God is not simple.

Definition of Nature and Person

Contradiction again arises in one's description of trinity if terms like nature and person are defined to cover the same domain. If "person" and "nature" have overlapping meaning then "three persons" would mean that which overlaps would be *three* but simultaneously that which overlaps would be *one* because God has one nature. For example, if a divine person is defined as "an intellect, emotion, and will" then such a person's "intellect" would be "omniscience" and "will" would be "sovereignty." Thus a divine person would be defined as "omniscience, emotion and sovereignty." In the trinity there would be three of these omniscient, emotional and sovereign Ones. Yet often omniscience and sovereignty are descriptions of God's nature. Thus, there is only one omniscient and sovereign being. But such definitions of person (intellect, emotion and will)[11] and nature (complex of divine attributes)[12] produce a real contradiction claiming simultaneously three omniscient sovereign beings and one omniscient sovereign being. Richard Swinburne recognizes that he holds this view and that it produces

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[11] One contemporary example of defining personality this way is C. C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 11-12. Richard Swinburne in *The Christian God*, pp. 126-27 defines person in a similar way as having beliefs of a certain complexity and being able to perform intentional actions of a certain complexity.

[12] One contemporary example of defining nature this way is C. C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 17-18. Richard Swineburne in *The Christian God*, pp. 154 agrees with this definition and on p. 186 he admits that such a definition renders such a trinity view as contradictory so he confesses that he translates *theos* inconsistently at times in a relational way to prevent contradiction.

a contradiction, so to prevent his view from being a contradiction he inconsistently translates *theos* at times in a relational way to prevent contradiction while at other times defining it in this traditional orthodox way. I don't think that Swinburne's inconsistency is worth emulating but we agree that this issue is a real contradiction and the concept of the trinity cannot be contradictory if it is to have meaning. This view of "person" with regard to the hypostatic union would consistently produce a description of Christ as having a unified intellect, emotion, and will. In such a view Chalcedon is denied, for the divine and human natures are mixed and change to unify intellect and will. Chalcedon would retain omniscience and sovereignty in the divine nature of Christ simultaneously with limitation of knowledge and submissiveness in Christ's human nature. The view that Christ only has one will as a unified person is a position the early church condemned at Constantinople in 681 AD as monothelitism.[13] To remedy this contradiction and condemned novelty requires leaving qualities of nature as reserved for nature, not imparting them into a definition of person. If someone was committed to including intellect, emotion and will within this definition of person then the simplest rehabilitation would redefine person as *an individual whose nature includes intellect, emotion and will.* This returns person to the definition range of a hypostasis or a who. An alternative rehabilitation could take one into a coherent social trinitarianism. However remaining within an orthodox trinitarianism keeps one consistent with Chalcedon and Constantinople; Christ would be a unified individual who had two distinct natures: the divine nature would be omniscient and sovereign, and the human nature would be limited (though growing) in knowledge, and submission. While I would not join Swinburne in appealing to the Freudian account of divided mind because it does not get to the depth of nature and it is tainted as psychosis, I do agree with his

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[13] A contemporary example of monothelitism is John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 119-20. He does not define person in his chapter on the person of Christ so he ambiguously maintains Chalcedon and monothelitism simultaneously. However, the two views are mutually exclusive with regard to will.

analysis that the divine mind would know omnisciently what the human mind would know but that Christ's limited human mind would not be able to grasp all His divine mind knows, and that the unified person of Christ could speak from either. Now, a practical issue is raised: should we define terms such as person by keeping them close to what a tradition has become or should we rehabilitate our definition of person in line with the issues that defined it originally? I think more precision is gained by returning to the earlier roots for it keeps one closer to both the Biblical emphasis and the patristic emphasis. My definition of person as *an instantiation of a spiritual nature, as a moral end in itself, in relationship to others,* attempts to reflect the Biblical and patristic emphasis. If a student needs a simpler definition for person, then define person as "who." There is repeated concern to identify a person as a nature in such phrases as "the Word is God" and "the Word became flesh." The closest word in the Biblical text to "person" is the holistic use of "soul" (*nephesh* and *psyche*)[14] which is identified as having a spirit or spiritual nature in both the Biblical text and in patristic anthropology. In both arenas there is concern that divine persons are to be obeyed, worshipped and served so they are a moral end in themselves at the level of supreme being. However, this definition attempts to define "person" for angels and humans as well, so it is best to leave "moral end in itself" in the definition and to allow the level of being to identify the appropriate moral implications. For example, a human person should not be worshipped, but rather respected, loved and not murdered. In the Biblical text and patristic Trinitarian discussion there is repeated concern for the divine persons being understood to be in an ontological relationship that has implications to the way they and we function in our distinct roles. It is from these Biblical and patristic emphases that my definition of "person" is formed.

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[14] For explanation and defense of the holistic view of soul, see Douglas Kennard and Paul Holmes, "The Nature of Man: A Biblical Theology Approach," or Hans Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, pp. 17-25, or James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 76-78.

However, my definition brings precise clarity in other issues as well. For example, a human fetus has human DNA, sufficient to identify it as human. The Bible describes a fetus as being body and soul accessible and created by the Spirit to be loved, valued by God, and in an ontological relationship to God and parents (Ps. 139:13-15; 51:5; Ex. 21:22-25). Thus the fetus is a human person and should not be aborted because it has personal human rights (e.g. Ex. 21:22-25). However, many other definitions of person (such as intellect, emotion and will or self-aware individual) cannot defend a fetus as a person. When does the will evidence itself? After birth? When does the intellect evidence itself? In the last trimester or after birth? When is someone self-aware? Within six months after birth? The author has heard papers presented by evangelicals who defend a pro-choice stand because the fetus analyzed by these psychological definitions is not a person yet. Whereas many other evangelicals who define person as "intellect, emotion and will" are just inconsistent as they defend a pro-life stand.

Mutable Immutability

Immutability is often given as one of the divine attributes. This means that with regard to divine nature God is unchanging and unchangeable. For example, the Father is consistent in His bestowal of good gifts with "no variation, or shifting shadows" (Jas. 1:17) so that no one should blame Him for temptations when the temptations actually are conceived by the human himself. This divine attribute identifies that God does not change in His essential nature. It is not threatened by appearances of the phenomenon within the created order. For example, having allowed blessing to come to man, God now repents (consistent with His nature) and brings judgment upon mankind since they have gone too far in their sins (e.g. Gen. 6:5-7). Immutability does not exclude God presenting Himself as repenting or turning in response to agents' choices. Immutability has to do with the consistency of the divine character, rather than His presentation of Himself. For example, judgment to those for whom it is due and blessing to those

for whom it is appropriate are consistent with God's character. Immutability does not require impassibility (unchangeability of divine emotions) for God is deeply relationally connected with His creation so that sin grieves Him deeply (e.g. Gen. 6:6). The faithful character of God with regard to His other attributes, such as righteousness and justice, permits God to have purposes not always known by others but at times communicated to those He has called into relationship (e.g. Gen. 18:17). Though God has purposed to do something (Gen. 18:17), Abraham reconfirms to himself that God is just by means of God's explaining Himself anthropomorphically. For example, God hears the outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20-21). God anthropomorphically goes to Sodom to see if in fact the sin evidenced by the outcry is as bad as the claims. In this, God comes to know the actual condition of Sodom by fairly investigating it first hand (Gen. 18:21; 19:1-13). This growing in firsthand knowledge communicates to those in relationship with God that His justice is fair, while God has obviously known all along because His purposes from the start reflect an extensive knowledge of the conditions already (Gen. 18:17; 19:13). Divine immutability is not threatened by God's changing His stated framework of operation or in answering prayer (e.g. Gen. 18:22-32). The fact that God is willing to preserve Sodom from judgment if there are fifty or even ten righteous people in the place shows the consistent responsiveness of God to the appeals and concerns of His chosen people. Through it all God shows Abraham that He is consistently righteous and will judge justly. In fact, God often goes beyond the believer's requests to show Himself consistent; even when ten righteous could not be found, the righteous were rescued while the wicked perished (Gen. 19:17; 2 Pet. 2:9). Furthermore, while the believer suffers and it appears to him as though God has changed by removing His presence (Ps. 42:9) we may rest assured that God's presence permeates everywhere and His knowledge is exhaustive and it is upon this basis that the believer can bring his petitions to God (Ps. 139). God really *is* the

immutable One who cares, knows it all, is everywhere and effectively answers our prayers.

Contradictions come for immutability when the change occurs on an ontological level with attributes of the divine nature rather than on an economic level of presentation of revelation. One of the most regular places where this kind of contradiction appears is when the divine nature of Christ is modified to form the hypostatic union, which occurs in different levels of kenotic Christianity. If Jesus Christ is immutable with regard to His deity (e.g. Heb. 13:8), then He needs to retain all His divine attributes without change. This means any giving up of some divine attributes (such as immutability, omnipresence, omnipotence, or omniscience) or self-limiting of these divine attributes is a real ontological change to this nature. For example, in such conditions at least the full empowerment of divine attributes is altered to a reduced empowerment within a self-limiting mode and that is real ontological change of those attributes and omnipotence (changed from full to limited empowerment of those attributes). So in a kenotic Christology's account of incarnation: an omnipresent Christ is no longer omnipresent, an omniscient Christ is no longer omniscient, an omnipotent Christ is no longer omnipotent, and an immutable Christ has in fact changed from full empowerment to self-limiting of those attributes. Such a kenotic view denies the Chalcedon formula by proposing real change in divine attributes (from full empowerment to limited empowerment) and maybe even a mixing of natures. This renders Christ mutable ontologically or mutable with regard to His essential attributes, which in fact is contradictory for any who also affirm Christ to be immutable with regard to His essential divine nature. Such a contradiction identifies that there is falsehood, not worthy to be believed.

The primary textual reason for such versions of kenosis (or emptying) are grounded in Philippians 2, but this text does not support such versions of kenotic Christology. Contextually, Paul underscores the need for Christians to be unified in love, mind and soul (Phil. 1:27; 2:1-2). This unity is obtainable by Christians

only as they are intent on the purpose of being humble, regarding the other as more important than oneself. We evangelicals who are often enamored with our own personal interests need this reminder to embrace humility and unity. It is in this context that Jesus' incarnation wonderfully displays humility as an example for us to follow (Phil. 2:5). Jesus Christ existed in the form (*morphē*) of God with regard to His divine nature (Phil. 2:6). *Morphē* has to do with form or shape which in this instance is Christ's preincarnate divinity, which had no lack. So that Christ did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped, grabbed or held onto like a snatch and grab artist that would grab something not his and run; Christ fully possessed the divine nature without diminishment. Within this context of strength Christ empties (*ekenōsen*) Himself in some way appropriate to the emphasis of the passage (Phil. 2:7). However, the passage never says that Christ self-limited divine attributes, rather what is being developed is the human need for humility which Christ exemplifies wonderfully in his humanity (Phil. 2:3-5, 7-8). So, the emptying (*ekenōsen*) needs to be seen in light of Jesus' human nature, the form (*morphe*) of a servant in the likeness (*homoiōmati*) of men (*anthrōpos*, Phil. 2:7). It is the person Christ in His human nature that is humble; humility (*etapeinōsen*) has to do with this human condition (*genomenos*; Phil. 2:8). That is, instead of demanding the honor due His deity, His humanity became obedient even to a dishonoring death on the cross. That this humility is working in this humanity is further evidenced by death, (which humans experience) whereas God cannot die. In response to Christ's obedient human pursuit of dishonor, God highly exalted Jesus' humanity in His ascension (Phil. 2:9-11). The exalted human Christ has a Name which is above every Name. Eschatologically everyone will submit to Christ and praise Christ as Lord to God's glory. There is no self-limiting of any divine attribute here, rather, while Christ in His deity has every right to demand honor, Christ in His humanity demonstrates humility obediently pursuing a course of dishonor, which is

rewarded by God's exalting Jesus as man to high honors in which God insists that others will also highly honor Him.

The presentation of Jesus Christ in the Gospels is mainly that of his humanity, birth, embodiment, growth in knowledge and ability, being tempted, aging, eating, admitting he does not know, being locally present, being hindered in ministry by demons and human unbelief, changing, dying, rising, and ascending. These changes of human nature do not contradict Christ's immutable divine nature of omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence and glory. Usually Christ's humanity depends upon the Father for knowledge (Jn. 17:7-8; Lk. 10:21-22) and the Spirit for empowerment to heal and do miracles (Acts 10:38; Mt. 12:28, 31). Occasionally, Christ's deity shows through His humanity as in stopping the wind in the storm, which prompts the disciples to worship Him (Mt. 8:26-27; 14:32-33). Such is an approach to the gospels which, with the Chalcedon formula, admits that Jesus Christ is a unified person with fully divine and human natures which exist without mixture, without change, without division and without separation.

Eternalizing Temporal Process

Under the influence of neoplatonism the relationships within the Trinity were specifically delineated in an ontological way as eternal generation of the Son and eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. The pressing concern that neoplatonism brings to those relationships is that if these are essentially true then they need to be eternal truths within the ontological trinity (trinity as it is before creation). In such a view, "eternal" means "outside of time, without change, and perpetual." However, here is where the contradiction comes, because the atemporal concept of eternal is linked to a temporal historical concept of birthing. Generation is built from the word *genaō* which means birth as a historical instance. What would a perpetual beyond history birth as a historical instance mean, but contradiction? Does it mean eternal extrusion? Does it mean a stoic procession

or essential extension? Whatever it means, the words chosen to express it deny each other: eternal demands a nonchanging, ahistoricity and *genaō* expresses historical birth that changes one to being beyond the womb. The particular version of *genaō* that is normally Biblically appealed to in defense of eternal generation is the word *monogenēs*, which means "unique birth." Non-Johannine uses of *monogenēs* mean, "only child," as in a family that has only one child (Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; Heb. 11:17). Johannine use develops *monogenēs* as a unique historical birth of the revelatory Word, Jesus Christ, thus enabling Christ to reveal God through Christ's humanity. For example, John 1:14 describes the unique birthing process (*monogenēs*) as the incarnation of Christ's humanity in flesh so that He as the Word could reveal the divine glory historically through His humanity. The fact that the Word is God (Jn. 1:1) means that the uniquely born (*monogenēs*) God (divine One adding humanity in his birth) is uniquely enabled to explain the Father, which explanation took place in the historic incarnation prior to John's writing his gospel (aorist of *exērgeomai;* Jn. 1:18). This uniquely born Word (born for the purpose of revealing the Father) has revealed God and after the ascension (as John is writing[15]), the divine Word interpenetrating the anthropomorphic breast (*kolpon*) of the Father. The Father gives the uniquely born (*monogenēs*) Son of God (in His incarnation coming into the world) for men to believe in Him and thereby obtain everlasting life (Jn. 3:16, 18; 1 Jn. 4:9). Since the Biblical text emphasizes *genaō* and *monogenēs* to be the historical birthing of Jesus' humanity in incarnation, and eternal generation claimed to be taught from these passages is itself contradictory, it is best to reject the ancient tradition that Jesus Christ was generated before all ages in eternity. The generation of the Son is best seen, consistent with the Biblical text, as the historical birthing of Jesus' humanity within the incarnation process. Christ as

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[15]*On*, the present tense of *eimi*, indicates a present relationship, but not a continued enwombment that would indicate that the unique birth in this context had not happened because, in fact, with the incarnation the unique birth occurs.

God is eternal, whereas His humanity was uniquely born in the historical incarnation event.

Likewise the procession of the Spirit is best seen as a historical process that occurs after Jesus Christ ascends, rather than an eternal procession motivated by stoicism or neoplatonism. The Biblical words for "sending" that procession describes are: "sending" (*pempsō*), "going out" (*ekporeyetai*) and "pouring forth" (*ekcheō*). While a stoic procession informed Tertullian's view of Trinity, we should make sure that our doctrines reflect the Biblical world view and not be attracted to foreign world views such as stoicism that might have helped frame the doctrine in the first place. The concept of sending (or procession) happens historically in time (as an economic relationship rather than an ontological relationship) indicating when the Spirit comes to continue Christ's ministry on earth. Thus eternal procession becomes a contradictory concept when it is informed by the Biblical text; "an eternal nonchanging ahistorical process occurs historically bringing about a change" is a contradictory concept. Furthermore, the Biblical text indicates that this procession happens historically when the Holy Spirit is sent to continue Jesus' ministry. John 14:17-18 indicates that the disciples with Jesus in the upper room have the Holy Spirit with them but there will be a change as Jesus leaves, for then the Holy Spirit will be in them. After Jesus leaves the Father will send (*pempsei*) the Holy Spirit to the disciples to remind these disciples about the things Jesus said to them when He was in fact with them (Jn. 14:25-26). The Holy Spirit will come after Jesus leaves, sent (*pempsō*) by Christ and going out (*ekporeyetai*) from the Father (Jn. 15:26). However, the Son must leave first and return to the Father who sent the Son and thus the disciples will have an advantage as Christ leaves, for the Son will send (*pempsō*) the Holy Spirit to them so that the Spirit might convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:5, 7-8). The same economic relationship of being sent that the Son had, the Holy Spirit will have, and thus the Holy Spirit is another comforter like Christ. In Acts 1:8 the Holy Spirit has not

been received by the disciples yet, so that they await His empowerment in the future. Christ finally ascends in Acts 1:9 leaving His disciples. On the feast of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fills the disciples and they have a dramatic empowerment to proclaim the gospel (Acts 2:2-4). God declares that in the last days He will pour forth (*ekcheō*) the Spirit on all mankind (Acts 2:17). Jesus Christ in His exaltation receives (*labōn*) the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and so Christ pours forth (*execheen*) this Holy Spirit phenomenon which the Jews present can see and hear (Acts 2:33). In the wake of this historical procession which happened at Pentecost, the Father sends (*exapesteilen*) the Spirit into believers' hearts prompting them to intimate prayer by which we cry out, "Daddy, Father" (Gal. 4:6). This condition of the indwelling Spirit who prompts believers to intimate prayer happens for all who belong to Christ, are adopted as sons by the Father and are co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:9, 15, 17). Since the Biblical text emphasizes procession to be a historical coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and eternal procession claimed to be taught from these passages is itself contradictory, it is best to reject the ancient tradition that the Spirit is from eternal procession. The procession of the Spirit is best seen, consistent with the Biblical text, as the historical coming of the Spirit on Pentecost. Within this economic sending[16] the Biblical text better aligns with a Western view that has the Holy Spirit sent by Father and Son; most of the sending words with regard to the Holy Spirit are used equally by the Father and the Son in the same way.[17]

Conclusion

If we are to understand, and worship, and teach about our God as Trinity, then let us do it in a way that is not unworthy (because it is a contradiction or

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[16] Economic sending rather than eternal ontological procession (which was used by the Fathers to frame this discussion) float the filoque (from the Son) clause, and separate Eastern Orthodoxy from the Catholic West.

[17] Compare *pempso* in Jn. 14:25 and Jn. 16:5 with Jn. 15:26 and 16:7. Compare *ekcheo* in Acts 2:17 with Acts 2:33.

because it does not reflect the Biblical text).   Let us make sure that our understanding, worship, loving, and teaching are both coherent and Biblical with the emphasis that God reveals concerning Himself.