

Simplicity, Analogy, and the Trinity: Restoring the Doctrine of Father-God from Contextualization Gone Awry 1¹

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Abstract

The ancient consensus on the Triune nature of God is absolutely correct, but the classic package that justifies and explains it is syncretistic. Especially grievous was the syncretism of Protestant authors after the Reformation with its renewed emphasis on the authority of Scripture. The resulting doctrine describes neither the Father of the Bible or the simple divinity of the philosophers. It needs to be reformed by an international hermeneutical community to develop a new consensus based upon biblical theology and not upon a neoplatonic substrate, robbing us of the true knowledge of our Father-God. That new consensus then should be contextualized into the thousands of ethno-cultural groups of the earth (and not the classical view). To demonstrate this, I discuss the Pauline doctrine of the antithesis, the biblical doctrine of the equal ultimacy of unity and diversity in the Trinity, and that only the biblical Father-God is worthy of worship.

Key Words: Contextualization, Syncretism, Simplicity Doctrine, Analogy, Antithesis

Introduction

My thesis is that the ancient consensus on the Triune nature of God is absolutely correct, but the whole classic package that justifies and explains it is syncretistic. It needs to be reformed by an international hermeneutical community to develop a new consensus based upon biblical theology and not upon a neoplatonic substrate, robbing us of the true knowledge of our Father-God. That new consensus then should be contextualized into the thousands of ethno-cultural groups of the earth (and not the classical view). Hence, only Scripture can describe “the only true God,” “our Father in heaven,” the absolutely personal and independent Sovereign over all things (Is 63:16, 64:8; Mt 6:9; Jn 17:3; Acts 17:25; 1 Tim 1:17; 1 Cor 8:6). The Father possesses a singular dynamic-Being, possibly equivalent to “the Name” mentioned in the Great Commission and the High Priestly Prayer (Mt 28:18; Jn 17:11-12). Yet, Scripture uniformly depicts him as an *indissoluble* diverse-unity who is ever-interpenetrating² his Word (e.g., Jn 14:10-11, 17:21) and Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-13; Rom 8:26-27) and *they in him*. Jesus said, “my Father and I are one,” (Jn 10:30), and the Vulgate and Latin-based Roman and Protestant churches confessed for centuries “these three are one,” a true deduction from biblical data, though the actual phrase comes from an almost universally, textually disputed passage (1 Jn 5:7-8 AV/TR).

Consequently, Scripture always describes this holy yet deeply emotive Father-God in interactive, temporal terms within that single divine Being/nature such that there has never been one *before* him and will never be one *after* him (e.g., Is 43:10, 45:14; Jn 17:3).³ He is always-alive, has always been, and always will be (e.g., Rev 1:8, 4:8)⁴ sharing his single life with the always-living Word (Heb 13:8) and everlasting Spirit (Heb 9:14). Furthermore, Scripture describes him as immutable only in character and necessary (incommunicable) divine attributes but mutable in interactions with his creation. Father-God, for example, cannot lie and then must later repent [Num 23:19; Tit 1:2]. Yet at the same time, God can have interactive mental and emotion-

al states with the actions he sovereignly chooses (Heb 13:8; Mal 3:1-7), otherwise the description of God in the Bible is merely fictional, wrecking its infallible truthfulness. “Our Father,” therefore, is not the absolutely-immutable-and-impassive-in-every-respect, non-complex Simplex that the classic Strong Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (S-DDS) teaches is the actual state of affairs within a single divinity’s Being.⁵ To establish this thesis, I will build upon three essential pre-suppositional doctrines of Scripture.

First, Paul launches a devastating salvo against Greco-Roman speculations about divinity: “In the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know him” 1 Cor 1:21a NASB). The S-DDS rejects this Pauline doctrine of the antithesis between Father-God’s wisdom in Christ, found exclusively in Scripture, and the concept of divinity found in much of Hellenized philosophy. George Eldon Ladd describes the background in Plato. Two aspects of the human soul, a part that is simple and unchanging, the other part mortal, exist. Plato describes the “spiritual” part of the soul as “simple in essence” and at war with the body

‘The soul is most like the divine ... immortal ... intellectual ... indissoluble and unchanging, and the body, on the contrary, most like the human ... mortal ... multiform ... un-intellectual ... dissoluble and ever-changing’ [Phaedo 80B]. The soul partakes of the nature of the divine ... [Phaedrus 246E], [with] objective existence in the realm of the invisible and incorporeal.⁶

Like Vedic Hinduism, the goal of humanity, trapped in the material, is to return to union with the One through a series of reincarnations. Human spirit resonates with Divine-Spirit. So, Plato’s simple soul (*atman* in Sanskrit) is most like the simple Divine-One (*Brahman* in Sanskrit).

This metaphysical speculation is not built upon Christ or his apostles’ thoughts. Neither does it build exclusively upon the revealed interaction, for example, between the three Persons within the Gospels. Further, it is so obtuse that only a Magisterium, schooled in Latin and Greek and in the obtuse explanations of the tradition, can grope after an understanding of it (see 2 Cor 1:13). In addition, the perspicuity of Scripture is virtually destroyed and the common believer is kept from the truth, contrary to the vision of the Reformation. It robs the people of God from a true biblical, personal knowledge of our interactive Father-God in Christ, replacing him, whom to know is life eternal, with a mere human construct of a generic divinity (Rom 1:21-25).

Second, the variants of DDS reject the actual Trinitarian Principle of Scripture in which the Godhead is irreducibly and indissolubly composed of true unity and real diversity at the same time. God, the Father, always has been, now is, and always will be the ever-living and interacting first Person, whose divine nature shares true-unity-and-real-diversity. The biblical Father lives in indissoluble interconnection and interpenetration with the Word and Spirit within his nature/being. This seems to be the revealed meaning of his name (Rev 1:8), confessed by the angel choruses in heaven (Rev 4:8, 11:17), which we are to announce to the peoples (Mt 28:19). In other words, within the Father dwells “the equal ultimacy of the one and the many,”⁷ as Cornelius Van Til puts it – true everlasting diversity and real everlasting unity within the one essence ever-shared by the Father with the Son and Spirit (Jn 5:26, 6:57). How this occurs, Scripture does not share with us and we probably ought not to speculate (Dt 29:29). On the other hand, classic speculative theologians explain its ancient theory as fact and the only way to read Scripture.

Third, all regenerate souls long for an interactive Father: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Ps 42:2 NIV 1982). On the other hand, the mind of the flesh, antithetically, is hostile to the true God (Rom 8:7) and always invents idols (Rom 1:18, 21-25). No one is able to have a mutual relationship with the static One of the S-

DDS doctrine unless more and more biblical material is unstably glued to it. Actually, the pervasive testimony of Scripture falsifies the theory of the tradition (Mk 7:8).

Foundational Definitions

Certainly, this does not mean Christ-followers throughout the globe ought to reject all of the philosophical distinctions and tools the Greeks developed, but that all must be checked by and if possible biblically reformed.⁸ Or they ought to be discarded into the dust bin of history if incompatible with revelation. Now, when an ancient school of autonomous thought amalgamates biblical insight into its teaching, the result is syncretism: Mixing biblical insight and biblically autonomous human wisdom, especially in the *core* doctrine of God. Syncretism, thus, is the

blending of one idea, practice, or attitude with another. Traditionally among Christians it has been used of the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements Syncretism of some form has been seen everywhere the church has existed. We are naïve to think that eliminating the negatives of syncretism is easily accomplished.⁹

Interestingly enough, the strictest forms of the doctrine of the S-DDS attempt to describe in words the One who is beyond explanation. This singular divine spirit can only be approached apophatically that is through the ancient *via negativa*. James Dolezal is forthright: “[Simplicity] is formally articulated apophatically as God’s lack of parts and denies that He is physically, logically, or metaphysically composite.”¹⁰ In this contemplative, apophatic process, divinity cannot be known as to his essence but only somehow experienced by negating any aspect imagined as analogous in this creation. An analogy of equivocation method is thus essential to the process.¹¹

In that method, however, divinity is not actually known because it is radically unlike anything found in this creation. That absolute ontological difference defines the Creator-creature distinction. Divinity is, thus, a non-composite Oneness with no real diversity of attributes in any sense whatsoever and which cannot belong truly to the simple essence, except as mere human cognition. Steven Duby writes: “In other words, what each attribute signifies is analogically but truly (indeed preeminently and originally) in God himself, while the consideration and construal of each attribute as formally distinct from the others and as though it were a quality ‘belonging’ to God is *owing to the limitations of the human mind*.”¹² Hence, humans can never have any real understanding of the Simplex because we reflect with both analytical and synthetic thought.

Therefore, divinity, as pure Unity without any true diversity *in se* (in itself), *cannot without introducing a measure of syncretism*, by the concept’s very definition, have any truly analytical (specific/discursive) thought. An unchanging Simplex cannot express an analytical thought or discursive word without introducing change into the Simplicity, which by definition is impossible. Hence any such thoughts can never be expressed in diverse creative or redemptive historical words: “Let there be light” and “This is my beloved Son.” Duby summarizes: “Breaking with predicative convention,” that is by attributing a character quality to divinity such as, e.g., God has omniscience, what we humans “apprehend and characterize as divine properties are *not* actually qualities inhering in God but rather only the divine essence variously *represented* to us.” In other words, God’s representation in the OT and NT actually mis-represent our Father, because the qualities and attributes they attribute to him are “not actually ... inhering in” him.¹³

Furthermore, any concept of composite-unity implies the possibility of death, the decomposition of divinity into parts, such as a distinct human body decomposes. Divinity cannot possess any present complexity (nor can it possess any prior assemblage of parts out of which divinity is composed as if something existed before it). Further, this idea of divinity is without any

intrinsic or extrinsic space, change, truly diverse attributes, or movement whatsoever lest they can be precipitated out of God. Absolute Unity is, thus, perfectly without the true diversity of temporal, metaphysical, or logical parts such as the sequence of time, diverse qualities, and so on. The S-DDS divinity has 1) no temporal aspects, 2) no intrinsic accidental properties nor actions extending through time – he is pure act all at once, 3) no physical-spatial composite parts, and, 4) no logical-metaphysical property aspects, parts, or properties at all.¹⁴ James Dolezal summarizes: Simplicity “is ... God’s lack of parts and denies that he is physically, logically, or metaphysically composite.”¹⁵ University of St. Andrews philosophical theologian, Ryan T. Mullins, summarizes: “One cannot have [classic] divine simplicity without timelessness and immutability”¹⁶ – and, I might add, strong impassibility. The simple One of the S-DDS is pure actuality (*actus purus*) with no potentiality to ever change at all (strong immutability).¹⁷

S-DDS Rejects the Biblical Antithesis Principle

Ancient Apophatic and Perfect Being Methodologies

First, Karl Barth’s critique, as cited by Steve Duby, who attempts to refute it, is apropos. The classic “‘general conception of God’ [–] adrift . . . [from] the doctrine of the Trinity [–] [which] . . . fosters an identification of God’s life with ‘pure being’ so that ‘divine simplicity was necessarily exalted to the all-controlling principle, the idol, which, devouring everything concrete, stands behind all these formulae.’”¹⁸ Classic philosophical theologians holding to the S-DDS presuppose the apophatic methodology. It is, however, a methodology common to most if not all Western and Eastern mysticisms as well. This fact is also candidly confessed by eminent Eastern Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart.¹⁹ Such mysticism must devour – that is escape from – everything concrete in this accidental, diverse universe – in order to *grok* (intuit by merging with), to use a term invented by Robert Heinlein, the divine One.²⁰ The methodology, thus, attempts to derive verities about divinity *via negativa*, that is through the way of negation, as mentioned in the definitions section above. The method first presupposes the dialectical dualism of a contradistinction between the many and the One. This means that the One–the Simplex–the non-diverse Divine-Being cannot ever become, it cannot by definition change. Indeed, is “not like” anything experienced in the ever-changing world of the many, that is of diversity. Related to this method is the “perfect being methodology” that also contemplates mystically upward to an imagined perfect divinity, which in Anselm’s classic words can be described in the words “than which no greater can be conceived.”

Dolezal, interestingly enough, readily admits that the S-DDS uses such a contemplative and apophatic methodology that by-passes biblical theology. Paul Helm doesn’t.

Biblical theology with its unique focus on historical development and progress, is not best suited for the study of theology proper ... because God is not a historical individual, neither does His intrinsic activity undergo development or change. This places God beyond the proper focus of biblical theology.”²¹

Dolezal seems here to be intuitively presupposing atemporality (“God is not a historical individual”) and strong immutability (“neither does His intrinsic activity undergo development or change”) – both essential to the S-DDS – as the reason for “placing God beyond the focus of biblical theology.” Upon what foundation, biblical or otherwise, does he make his intuition better than a biblical theologian founded upon the perspicuous word of Scripture?

Paul Helm²² makes a similar philosophical move concerning Perfect Being theology, a related methodology,²³ but unlike Dolezal, attempts to find it in Scripture. His arguments are as

question begging as Dolezal's. For example, he cites Hebrews 6:13-14, which teaches that there is none greater than or equal to God. From this data, Helm concludes that Anselmian Perfect Being (PB) natural theology is biblical. Like Dolezal, has his paradigm perhaps blinded him to the process? I believe so. The ruling proper theology ecclesial paradigm blinds simplicity proponents to their underlying presuppositions. On the other hand, the passages he cites, it seems clear, are reiterating the biblical-theological fact that the creating, providing, ruling, revealing, and redeeming God is the sole divinity of the universe and nothing beyond or before him exists nor is greater in might or power. No other speculations ought to be made beyond that which is written or can be unmistakably deduced from those facts (Dt 29:29).

It seems clear that both reject the sole magisterial authority of biblical theology, which they believe cannot by itself without the lens of natural theology understand the true nature of God. It can understand perhaps only his actions through the Trinitarian economy in history. Only the magisterial mystical tradition has the correct knowledge into the One. This excludes, then, the common reader of Scripture from Papua New Guinea, Java, the Punjab, the Kikuyu of Kenya, or the Navajo from the American South West. So ironically, as Reformed Protestants, Helm, Duby and Dolezal seem to presuppose the dual catholic-orthodox authority of Scripture *and* Tradition as interpreted by the Magisterium of the doctors of the ancient, Medieval Church, and Reformed scholastics though I would anticipate they would disagree.

Duby writes: "Simplicity enfolds both apophatic and cataphatic impulses in theological description."²⁴ Even though Simplists such as Steven Duby uses a method more encompassing of both the apophatic (negative) and cataphatic/kataphatic (positive, Scripture derived) methodologies than James Dolezal and R. Helm do, any merging the two methods is by definition syncretistic. Jordan P. Barrett, on the other hand, is even bolder and claims simplicity is fully "revealed" in Scripture. In the process, he admits aspects of what missional theologians term "syncretism" without possibly being aware that this has occurred: "As a revealed doctrine, divine simplicity is not the outcome of classical theism, apophatic theology, metaphysics, speculation, speculation, or Greek philosophy. It may contain some of these elements just as many Christian doctrines do, but none of these aspects form the true source or motivation for simplicity."²⁵

Ancient Autonomous Reasoning

Along with the definition of simplicity and the discussion of apophatic and perfect being-based theologies, a further word about theological methodology is necessary. Of primary importance is that I take a nuanced perspective on the foundational presupposition controlling all true human thinking. In this I follow insights of biblical Apologist, C. A. Van Til and others of the Amsterdam school such as Herman Dooyeweerd and H.G. Stoker, as well as modified insights of Colin Gunton. In general, these Christian theologian-philosophers teach that according to Scripture, a regenerate Christ-follower must begin all true supposition about the everlasting nature and power of God with the revealed, biblical facts, not follow natural and fallen human intuitions. Scripture teaches that our Father-God's being is Triune, one in which dwells true, indivisible unity and real, non-separable diversity at the same time. Therefore, there are not three divided individual high divinities such as the Hindu Trimurti nor does the one God wear three masks or reveal himself in three modes of practice.

Furthermore, to reveal himself truly, Father-God's creation must possess true unity and real diversity at the same time, reflecting his glory. No datum of the creation comes as a non-connected brute fact, but comes as facts corresponding to the reality upheld by the Triune God and cohering to the system of truth upheld by that same God and flowing out of the three-one

nature of ultimate reality. Consequently, diversity is not logically prior to unity such as in some forms of postmodern philosophy nor is unity logically prior to diversity as seems to be the basic presupposition of the S-DDS doctrine.²⁶ Both are equally ultimate in the Godhead and his creation that manifests his glorious Life. Last, the revealed unity and diversity within the Godhead consists of both of distinct character qualities and real personal distinction.²⁷ This is the supreme idea controlling all other ideas, as Colin Gunton reminded us following Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “The Trinity is the idea of ideas”²⁸ found in Scripture.

Furthermore, I presuppose that the S-DDS with its syncretistic (Neo-)Platonic worldview substrate, has existed throughout its long and venerable history as *only one among other explanatory frameworks* that attempt to explain the data and worldview provided by Scripture. And even then, the S-DDS, is by far not the best because it denies the total darkness of unregenerate human reasoning. We need rebirth and the regenerating Spirit to spiritually “see” (Eph 1:15-19a; Tit 3:5-6). The mind set upon the strength of mere “flesh” and not upon the “Spirit” is hostile to God, rejects his Word, and indeed is not able to do his instructions (Rom 8:7). Because of the fall of Adam, although all know God they reject him, suppress his truth, and their already foolish hearts are further darkened, because they exchange their Glory and Light for idolatrous physical and mental images of other divinities (Rom 1:18-25). Idol-manufacturing people must hence reject the emptiness of their thinking, and their darkened reflections about divinity because of their rebel hearts (Eph 4:17-19) to come to know the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Father and his Father. Instead, they need to once and for all put off their old person in Adam and irrevocably put on the new person in Christ by having their minds continually renewed by the Spirit (Eph 4:20-24). Our Father speaks solely through his Word, manifest first in the creation revealing the Trinitarian principle, in the written Scripture, and perfectly in the God-man, Jesus.²⁹

S-DDS Denies Total Depravity of Autonomous Human Constructs of Divinity

On the other hand, the S-DDS’s Scripture-autonomous, fleshly, and spiritually blind methodology has illogically, it seems to me, proclaimed *effable* conclusions about, for example, the immanent ontology of what they confess to be the sole and *ineffable* divinity. Certainly, then, the divinity the S-DDS describes is definitely not the knowable and interactive God as revealed in Scripture. The S-DDS God is not the Father of the still-living Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as revealed in both the OT and NT (Ex 2:24; Mt 22:32; Acts 7:32; Is 63:16, 64:8). He is certainly not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ without a huge amount of vacillating equivocation and syncretism (see e.g., Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 2 Cor 1:3, 11:31; Rom 15:6; 1 Pet 1:3). When biblical theologians point this out, however, the tradition tends strongly to opt to the default pre-assessment: “The [Thomist] analogy method” easily solves this dilemma.³⁰ I will discuss the Thomist analogy method more in-depth later, but it is sufficient to say here that the method is actually an “analogy of equivocation” and not an accurate use of the analogy methodology. The biblical description of the true diversity of the Father and Spirit interacting with the Son at, for example, his baptism and its description of Father-God’s truly diverse love and justice only being reconciled in the cross (e.g., Rom 3:23-27) are, thus, not mere anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms as the tradition states. Certainly, the “like a dove” used to describe the descent of the Spirit is grammatically a simile and other true analogies are used but never equivocally.

The Biblical Principle of Antithesis

Next and of major importance, the principle of antithesis of human and divine wisdom is a basic given of Scripture. It teaches that no neutral ground exists between human-sourced and divine/biblical sourced wisdom.³¹ Concerning every square inch of the earth, the Lord Jesus cries

out “Mine” as Abraham Kuyper is famously quoted as saying. All ground with which to communicate intelligibly belongs solely to the Creator (Ps 24:1) and his Word. In other words, the biblical principle of the antithesis of human natural wisdom, based on the fallen, and God-rebellious (autonomous) reasoning of humanity *over against* the pure wisdom revealed from above in Scripture must control our understanding of divinity (1 Cor 3:18-21; see also Jas 3:13-18).³² I must hasten to add, this certainly does not include Thomism or any other related syncretistic philosophies, contrary to Steve Duby, who claims that “we should look to *this* [Thomist] *philosophical tradition* not Kant or Hegel” to express “what God is like according to scriptural teaching.”³³ “Indeed, it is fundamentally an exposition of things human beings know to be true prior to engaging in any formal academic work,” he writes a page earlier.³⁴ Paul, James, and Jude characterize such autonomous theologizing as “ψυχικὸς” dare I say “natural theology,” false-wisdom, devoid of and untaught by the Spirit, following the “wisdom of this age” (1 Cor 1:20; Jude 19), earthly-sourced and not “from above,” even demonic (Jas 3:15; 1 Tim 4:1-4), . God’s wisdom, on the other hand, builds solely upon the transcendental foundation³⁵ of awesome respect (“fear”) of God and his Word as the first principle of wisdom (Prv 9:10; Pss 19:7-9, 111:10)³⁶ and upon the person, work, and words of our Lord, the very Wisdom of God (Col 2:1-9; 1 Cor 1:24, 30). He says: “Whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (see, Jn 12:47-50). Practically, these passages mean that Christ’s Spirit-led, spokesmen vigorously reject using *any* autonomous human wisdom doctrines or methodologies such as the apophatic or perfect being methods to find truth that our Father-God has revealed through our King Jesus. He himself forbids their use under the *theopneutos* of Father-God, who, he states, hid the truth from the “wise and learned” (NIV) but revealed them *only* to “babes,” who were solely dependent upon Abba’s wisdom from above (Lk 10:21 AV).

Now, this leads to two further basic assumptions I have been using in this paper. Of primary importance is that only God’s perspicuous Word can give a proper definition of our Creator and of his attributes not human consensus. Human consensus can be wrong and it can reject and pervert truth and justice (see e.g., Ex 23:2-3). Only the Bible is Father-God’s revelation. This is so basic it should not need to be said. Therefore, it is both anti-biblical and an illogical appeal to authority to cling to any ancient consensus as a norm discovered outside of Scripture when such a consensus violates clear Scriptural description of our Triune Creator. So clearly, next, those religious, philosophical, and scientific traditions contrary to God’s perspicuous word are alone truly “foolish,” not wise or beneficial. Jesus was adamant about this, citing Scripture from Isaiah: “You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition” (Mt 15:6b NIV; Is 29:13). Echoing his Lord, Paul teaches that any doctrinal and ethical standard, any methodology, and any wisdom-tradition that takes a person “captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy” is a standard that “depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world.” It does not depend solely “on Christ” that is upon Scripture’s revelation of his person, work, and words (Col 2:7 NIV). Both Paul and John state these truths explicitly. Elemental spirits in rebellion against God, the spirit of the pseudo or false Christ, who bring demonic doctrines can indeed truly and deeply infect Christianized philosophy and doctrine, twisting the Gospel (e.g., 1 Tim 4:1-8; 1 Jn 4:1-8; Jam 3:15; Gal 1:8-10). Only in that Gospel can be come into relationship with the Father through the Son/Word by the Spirit.

Paul counters the Greco-Roman philosophical wisdom of his day that undermined the Gospel, by quoting a litany of Old Testament sources in support of his contention that God’s truth and the idolatrous wisdom traditions about Father-God and his ethical principles are antithetical. Simply put, a simple Thomist divinity with absolutely no diversity and the biblical Fa-

ther with true-unity-and-true-diversity in himself are mutually contradictory. One is derived from Scripture but the other from idolatrous philosophy. Both cannot be true. Paul claims the first alternative is a hostile “wisdom of the world” (1 Cor 1:21, see 17, 18, 19, 20, 3:19; see, Is 29:14, 64:4, 40:13; Job 5:13; Ps 94:11). Solomon agrees that trusting in YHWH with all one’s heart means to never lean on one’s own autonomous understanding (Prv 3:5-6) because only the Everlasting Sufficient One, our YHWH-God, gives wisdom. Solely “from his mouth alone comes knowledge and understanding” (Prv 2:6). Our Father, thus, catches the wise in their craftiness, destroys the wisdom of the wise, and knows that their thoughts are futile speculations (see, Is 29:14, 64:4; Job 5:13; Ps 94:11; cf. Rom 1:21-22). They certainly do not describe matters any person knows “to be true prior to the engaging in” academic study of Patrology.³⁷ Indeed, the temptation to build on such autonomous wisdom cut off from the revelatory word of the Father was the essence of the first temptation itself. Definitely, the first couple’s eyes were opened as the Tempter stated, but only with bitter irony. The irony was that they became “wise in their own eyes,” knowing good and evil for themselves, both of which God forbids (Gen 3:7). Instead, they were not to live by manufactured bread but to hold on to every word of their Father’s tôranic wisdom with holy awe and then to build upon it alone (Prv 3:7; Mt 4:4, 7:24-25; Rom 12:16).

Now certainly all evangelicals would agree, I would think, that tradition in and of itself is not intrinsically evil. It certainly also is true that general revelation (not natural theology) gives every human of cognizant mind the external knowledge of God and his core ethical principles so that everyone is without excuse (Rom 1:18-21, 32, 2:1-16). Most all Protestants would also believe that councils of even godly Christian men have often been found to be erroneous (*Belgic Confession*, Art. 7). Much more, then, the opinions of idolatrous philosophers, when violating clear Scripture, are biblically heterodox. Another example of a claim that the S-DDS is the sole means to understand divinity is Paul Helm. The S-DDS as the “classical conceptual shape of Christian theism offers a template” through which to organize, properly appreciate and to see the occasional and unsystematic character” of the varied data on Scripture. Therefore, the S-DDS “is not so much an explanatory but a *grammatical template*” to read the Scripture.³⁸ In other words, Helm’s approach, like Duby’s, is a means to justify the reading Scriptural data through an autonomously decided upon interpretative grid.

George Eldon Ladd so admirably describes the true nature of this template in his neglected volume, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth*. He writes, “because the Platonic dualism is roughly similar to [later] Gnostic dualism” of the “missionary context” and because the other Greek views such as “Stoic pantheistic materialism” are not dualistic and do not figure much into the debate, the then-current and still present “debate on the 1st century “syncretism,” must take “Platonic dualism” as “the Greek view” of human wisdom Paul combats.³⁹ To this, I would also add that this (Neo)Platonic dualist perspective of ultimate reality was conceptually close to the well-developed Gnostic dualism of the Second Century missionary context that Paul prophetically warned against in his letter to Timothy (e.g., 1 Tim 4:1-7; see also 2 Tim 4:3). The simple god, as we shall see, is a close analog to “the Simplex,” the simple divinity of the Neoplatonism that so influenced and the early Greek fathers, Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas. The Greco-Roman world, Paul proclaimed, certainly never understood the Father’s wisdom because if they had, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:1-8), the one who is “our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” become flesh (Tit 2:13; see 2 Pet 1:1-2).

Pauline sola Scriptura and *solus Christus*

Certainly, almost all would agree that the scholastic S-DDS tradition did get some biblical facts correct such as that Jesus and his Father are truly one yet somehow distinct at the same time. The original Reformational sola Scriptura teaching, on the other hand, sought to reform all of tradition but in this case did not go far enough. Yet, Paul and later Peter clearly write that no regenerate believer, in any people-group, ought ever “to go beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6c) so as to teach “cleverly concocted fables” (2 Pet 2:16). Only by following apostolic advice in the matter at hand can a person “think God’s thoughts after him” (Johannes Kepler, C.A. Van Til), so as to come to know him and his works.

The Corinthians lived face-to-face with a similar cultural narrative and with a similar temptation to mix biblical truth with autonomous human wisdom as the scholastic fathers did and which we all do today. Those receiving the temptation have rejected a pure Gospel core of the Christian worldview narrative. They exclude a solid biblical foundation, built solely on Christ (*solus Christus* – Eph 2:20), for a narrative built on Tradition *and* Scripture. Therefore, why do Protestant and Reformed proponents insist that the biblical narrative and doctrinal data points which all agree upon must *only* be interpreted *solely* through the single framework of neo-Platonic influenced tradition? That the Reformation-oriented community that claims it builds solely upon Scripture continues debating this demonstrates, in my opinion, the utter blinding effect of what Ladd correctly call “syncretism.”

Paul, like the Jewish prophets and the literature of Second Temple Judaism, simply did not occupy themselves with the Greco-Roman fascination with a simple divinity, as Richard Bauckham⁴⁰ reminds us:

The idea that divine nature, by contrast with finite creatures, is indivisible or noncomposite occupied the Greek philosophical tradition and became an issue for the fathers of the early church, but it was not apparent in Jewish literature of this period, not even with Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish thinker who appropriates Greek [specifically Platonic] philosophical ideas in many respects.

“In the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him” (1 Cor 1:21a). Paul’s reasoning for rejecting the Greek Simplex divinity is clear. Only Christ is the “wisdom of [Father-]God” and only in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of [Father-God’s] wisdom and knowledge” (1 Cor 1:30-31; Col 2:3). No pagan Greek would agree because that teaching is “foolishness” to them. Only we, however, who possess Spirit-illuminated “eyes” are able to most clearly see who Father-God is “in Christ,” as our Lord himself testified several times (e.g., Jn 14:5-11). Well-educated Paul, thus, most likely was well aware of Jewish proto-Gnostic teachers of his day.⁴¹ He certainly as well aware of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (Acts 17:18) as well. So, it is not unlikely that he was acquainted with [Neo-]Platonic views of divinity as well that later morphed into the fully developed simplist teaching of the Scholastics.⁴²

The statement, “not to go beyond that which is written,” according to Paul, means that the Father’s true and faithful presuppositions can only be revealed by the Logos-Christ through the Holy Spirit. He alone comprehensively searches the mind of the Father (1 Cor 2:10-13). Further, he inscripturates solely in the Bible the foundational framework for all that is necessary for wisdom and for healthy and reverent life and worship in all areas of life (2 Tim 3:14-17; 2 Pet 1:2-7). Anything beyond this supreme norm is either a subconscious, syncretistic blurring of vision; or perhaps, for some, an outright deception (Ps 1:1; Eph 4:17-21; 1 Tim 4:1-7; Col 2:2-9).⁴³ No middle ground exists. Either we are totally for our King or completely against him. Either we live by Father-God’s thoughts that are higher than our thoughts, or by our own human-centered autonomous thoughts (Is 55:6-11). Paul continues, only the “wisdom from above” can interpret

correctly our Father's triune nature and its revelatory reflection in the universe (1 Cor 2:12-16). It alone rejects "boasting in man" (1 Cor 3:21) because only in the God-man are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding" (Col 2:2-4). Nothing, then, exists for humans to build sound and true love of wisdom (philosophy), understanding, and knowledge upon except our Father's thoughts. Paul says without equivocation: "Don't let anyone deceive himself. He who thinks he is wise in this age must first become a fool according to the idolatrous world's standards in order to become genuinely wise. The wisdom of idolatrous cultures is foolishness before God . . . so that no-one can boast in man" (1 Cor 3:18-20, my translation).

Conclusion to the doctrine of antithesis

Certainly, the passages I have cited do offend some just as our Lord offended many with strong truth (Mt 15:2). However, any "earthly-sourced" wisdom-tradition not solely coming down from above from the "Father of lights" does offend the fleshly mind, which is hostile to God, does not seek him nor understand him (Rom 3:9-12, 8:7-8). The earthly sourced tradition is, "soulish" and "devoid of the Spirit", ultimately "demonic," from the Prince of lies himself (Jas 3:12; Jude 19; Eph 2:1-3). In the Apostle's day, it threatened the very core of the Gospel and still negates the true personal and interactive knowledge with our Father by the Spirit through Christ even today.

From this, I deduce, biblical-exegetical theology must be given priority in all matters of Patrology in order to discover a proper theology. Out of these careful biblical theological conclusions, checked with careful cross-cultural consultation with fellow believers, can collaborating theologians build a biblical-theologically based Systematic Theology. Only based upon these two can Scripture-dependent Philosophical Theology be developed. S-DDS proponents begin in exactly the opposite direction, it seems.⁴⁴ Any other procedure leads to syncretism at best or a blatant return to idolatry with redefined "Christianized" terms at worst.

Therefore, also, a biblical Christian, founded upon the Reformational sola Scriptura, needs to confess that any earthly-sourced wisdom-template "based on merely human commands and teachings" is empty of divine wisdom (Col 2:22 NIV; Jas 3:15). No philosophical tradition and interpretative template, therefore, can remain true and reject the perspicuous words of our Father in Scripture. This includes any ancient religious or metaphysical tradition of the elders (Mt 15:1-8) including the simplicity doctrine.⁴⁵

Only through living by the purified and true Scripture-words of Father-God can a person live with wisdom (Dt 8:2-3; Mt 4:4, 7:24-27; Ps 12:6). Our heart and conscience, washed by Christ's blood and now led in the Spirit, must be taught only by that perspicuous Word and the clear logical deductions from it as the best of the Reformational confessions state (Rom 9:1; Heb 9-10), *even though, I grant, they all confess a simple God without parts*. This lack of consistency demonstrates again, I believe, the blinding effects of syncretism and of tradition even upon our best Western Confessions of Faith (Mt 15:14). Hence, "let God be true and every man liar" (Rom 3:5). Any locus of theology that includes invented earthly-sourced theological constructs that do not come "from above" is a "worthless thing," and idolatrous. "Turn my eyes away from worthless things, preserve my life according to your word" (Ps 119:17). Fleshly human minds are a veritable "idol factory," as John Calvin reminds us. Only as that Word, breathed out and now illuminated by the Spirit of the Father (1 Pet 1:17; Rom 8:10-11) teaches us, can the international body of Christ able to organize the data of Scripture into true doctrinal loci.

Last, it seems to me that invoking mystery when the secret has been clearly revealed, in order to obfuscate a real contradiction in the simplicity doctrine muddles perspicuous truth. The

God of Scripture includes two truths within himself. “Only [one] true God,” the Father-God of “Jesus Christ, whom [he] ... has sent” (Jn 17:3), exists. The second truth is that this same Father possesses and mutually indwells his Son and Spirit, sharing his everlasting power, divine nature, and hence shares equal glory, worth/value, and power with them (Jn 5:18; Php 2:6). Yet at least in the economy of pre-planning, then creation and redemption (and most likely also in the immanent Trinity as well), the three have always possessed different roles. For example, it was always befitting that only the Word (the Son, the Image, the Radiance of God’s Glory) would become incarnate. The Three possess true and real unity and also at the same time they also possess real diversity of role. Furthermore, “I and my Father are one,” thus, must also include the Spirit in that self-same divine identity because only the Son knows the Father and the Spirit witnesses of all that the Son possesses. Also, the Spirit knows the deep things of the Father. Yet, only one Name exists with a real diversity of the three persons (Mt 28:18). Only in these three distinct interacting Persons do we inescapably encounter singular divine Being. On the other hand, the S-DDS account that a simple, non-diverse divinity exists (somehow, illogically, with three Persons), and the biblical account that Father-God exists with real diversity of Persons within his single being, are antithetical. No amount of word juggling can harmonize the two as Aquinas and his followers have tried for centuries. There is a way forward, however, which I will explore in this and future articles on the nature and attributes of Father-God for our multi-ethnic world.

Summary

In summary, first, biblical-theological wisdom concerning the “doctrine of Father” (Patrology), in direct contradistinction to the scholastic/Thomist philosophical “theology proper,” is *solely* taught by the Spirit in Scripture. “The instruction from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold” (Ps 119:72), so why seek treasure anywhere else? Paul reiterates throughout the whole first section of First Corinthians the same (see e.g., 1 Cor 2:10-16). Divine wisdom, which solely comes from the mouth of the Father of Lights through the Spirit, cannot be derived from Scripture-autonomous human wisdom. The Tradition – I capitalize deliberately – will never be able to come to know the true Abba of our Lord Jesus Christ: “In the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God” (1 Cor 1:21a, see context, 1:19-21). Therefore, biblical theological wisdom, derived from both Testaments, discerned with sensitivity to genre and context yet without the distorting spectacles that syncretizes with neoplatonic philosophy, *falsifies* the simplicity doctrine of natural theology.

Second, I believe, Paul would claim that Greco-Roman natural theology (and its simplicity template) was “wisdom of the [idolatrous] world.” Hence, it is an alternative-enlightenment (Gen 3:1-7), that illicitly believes the simplicity template of classical philosophical speculation instead of God’s interpreting word. Biblical Christians must stand with what Luther is reputed to have stated: “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise” with my heart and conscience captive to the Word of God alone. If we do not stand upon that, we could all come to accept some of the radical Gospel perversions that the Tridentine institution adopted by declaring Aquinas, “the” Doctor of the Church (Leo XIII, 1880). No natural theology can ever come to know the Father-God, hence he “was pleased” to make himself known only through the preaching of the Gospel-word.⁴⁶

Philosophical theologian, Ryan Mullins, is spot on when discussing simplicity defender, James Dolezal. He, like Paul Helm, who wrote the Foreword to the volume Mullins is reviewing, use the same flawed theological methodology. They both selectively read Scripture.

Dolezal is starting his project with the God of classical theism and then turning to the Bible for proof-texts. ... That this is Dolezal’s approach [is supported] upon surveying the

bibliography of ATIIG [*All That Is In God*]. In the bibliography, one will see a preponderance of references to works on Thomistic metaphysics, and yet only one reference to a biblical scholar – D. A. Carson. ... I gather that such biblical scholars are excluded from the conversation because they do not take the contemplative approach to theology.⁴⁷

Dolezal does not agree with Mullins. He doubles down: “The contemplative approach to theology proper treats God as an ahistorical being and seeks to discover the timeless truths about Him by thinking through the implications and entailments of those things He has revealed.”⁴⁸

Analogy Methodology

Not only does the S-DDS’s method reject the sola Scriptura derived doctrine of antithesis, it rejects the Scripture’s true analogy procedure to reason about the nature of our knowable Father. Duby, for example, responds to the critique of analytical philosophers by complaining that they express “the analytic [philosophers’] exasperation about the real identity of God’s perfections or properties turns on [their] ... presumption of univocity.” Instead, humans must relinquish “the penchant to stencil the structures of creaturely ontology or cognition onto God’s being ... God’s properties ... are present in God differently than in the creature.”⁴⁹ Duby’s assertion, however, flows out of the common scholastic presupposition of the “sheer alterity” consisting of a “categorical distinction” and a “fundamentally different [ontological] order” between the divinity and the creation.⁵⁰ In other words, according to the S-DDS a dualistic absolute-dissimilarity between the ontologies of the One/Simplex and that of the Many creatures exists. This presupposition is alien to Scripture but found in ancient holist philosophies.⁵¹

As we will see, the Bible teaches that Father-God possesses and indeed is in himself both true unity and real manyness/diversity at the same time and within the same Being. To reveal himself in the creation, the Creator made every creature to reflect something of this same trinitarian principle. The result is that all humans are indeed able to know something exactly about our Father-God by the principle of true analogy and are therefore be “without excuse.” If what we know is merely our conception of God but not what he has revealed to us, then humans have an excuse. Anything other than this would allow some human to rightly claim that God is unjust (Rom 9:14). However, Paul is clear: Let God be true and every person a liar (Rom 3:3) and he judges according to the truth every thought and deed of humans who constantly suppress the Creator’s truth (Rom 2:2, 6, 1:18-21). If both of these propositions are false, then God, the Father in Christ, would not be able to justly judge the world (Rom 3:6).

However, in the S-DDS, the divinity’s character qualities and properties are not real distinctions within the non-diverse essence. In a simple spirit, each is only distinct in human cognition, because the Essence is a true Oneness. In creatures, these sorts of character qualities actually do differ because creatures partake of real diversity. But, this is begging the question. The Doctors only know this by first presupposing the Simplex of ancient philosophy. Duby, for one, claims this does not lead to agnosticism about the real immanent nature of the simple divinity.⁵² Citing Aquinas and Francis Turretin, he claims that though all the attributes of the Simplex are actually without real diversity, they are, nonetheless, not synonymous.⁵³ This is a real contradiction. Such mystical gnosis of the One differs little from Veda’s Brahman and Plotinus’ the One, and, in my opinion, is one clear reason why a revival of Trinitarianism came to pass in the 20th century. That revival is threatened by such over-zealous reassertion of such incomprehensibility.

My point is this. Certainly, no sound theologian claims that humanity has comprehensive knowledge of God. Yet, on the other hand, if a person rejects a core univocal connection point, no analogy possesses any meaning whatsoever.⁵⁴ The Father, Scripture teaches, created the

whole universe to *reveal* his glory so that humans can find him (Acts 17:23, 27) and no longer have to grope around in noetic darkness. He is not able to create in any other way because everything he does from creation to consummation reflects his character and glorious being: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:18-21; Eph 1:4-14; Ps 115:1; Is 43:7). Therefore, it is proper to reason upward from his revelation in creation – illuminated and checked by Scripture, certainly – to understand something about Father-God by true “analogy without equivocation.” In addition, Father-God created us in his image and likeness to represent himself on earth. Further, he sent his “only-begotten,” “his first born,” and the “radiance of his glory” to earth. We understand these terms only by an analogical method that reasons from his revelation in creation, illuminated by the Spirit in the Word. (This is not equivalent to Scripture-autonomous natural theology).

Consequently, our Lord descended from glory to take on full humanity in order to reveal Father-God to us. To understand our Father in those points that he has revealed himself in Christ, then, no one can discount the full sufficiency of our Lord’s incarnate manifestation of the person, work, and character of Abba (Jn 1:1-3, 14-18, 5:17-30, 14:5-11, 31, 15:24). Next, only the Hebrews’ Scripture can accurately describe the only living God, who was only “known in/through Judah” (Ps 76:1; Jer 9:23-24; Jn 4:22; see Rom 3:2) and known, at present, only “in Christ,” the true Israel (Jn 15:1), “the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen!” (Rom 9:1-5 NIV). Hence, now only in Christ are we able to come to know the Father (Jn 1:1, 14-18, 4:22, 17:1-3; Heb 1:1-3; Lk 10:22). Consequently, how Father-God interacted on earth with both his Israelite son and with the incarnate Jewish Son *par excellence* ought also to analogically reveal quite a bit about how he interacts with the Son (and the Spirit) before the creation. Otherwise, the Scriptures I cited above are incoherent and we know nothing about who Father-God is.

This is true, after all, because he chose to reveal his person, character, attributes, and his actions, along with the interpretation of their meaning, only through the *Israelite* seers and prophets and finally in his *Judean* Son (Heb 1:1). Among these, I include the foundational *Jewish* “apostles and prophets” of our Lord (Eph 2:20, 3:5). It is through this wisdom *alone*, all mankind would be able to come to relationally know him, the true God of all the earth (Jn 17:3). This word, and only this word, is the Jew’s Gospel for all nations. Richard Bauckham agrees: “Since the biblical God has a name and a character, since this God acts, speaks, relates, can be addressed and, in some sense, known, the *analogy* of human personal identity suggests itself as the category with which to synthesize the biblical and biblical understanding of God.” He is, hence, “not the philosophical abstraction to which the intellectual currents of contemporary Greek thought aspired.”⁵⁵

John’s Gospel and First Letter substantiates Bauckham’s claim. We have true knowledge of the Father and the Son from what we experience, “see,” “touch,” and “hear,” concerning the “Word of Life” incarnate. Through him, and the Father’s earthly relationship with him and the Spirit, we analogously come to know concrete things about Father. Again, I want to emphasize that Scripture elsewhere clearly teaches that Father-God is not physical but “pure spirit” (Jn 4:24). So, we cannot reason analogically from our physical eyes and ears to the spiritual Father or the spiritual Word in the Father [ὁ λόγος ... ἐν τῷ πατρὶ] (Jn 1:1, 18, 10:38, 14:10, 11) in order to impute these to the Father as do the Mormons. Again, we cannot know comprehensively. Yet we can know what is revealed about Father-God from what we “see,” “hear,” “touch,” concerning Christ through the eye-witness testimony in the Gospels and Epistles.

Our Lord sums this up: “If you see me, you have seen the Father” (Jn 14:9-11). His words and works truly reveal the Father by the analogy-of-univocal-core:

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. (NIV)

Taking all this in account, we can, logically, reason analogically back to the immanent Father-Son relationship from what we know about God in Christ from Scripture’s description of the economic relations.⁵⁶ Scripture is Father-God’s sole written revelation and is the first and final check against any theological error. Therefore, Scripture itself ought to be read only through philosophical “glasses” – that is through worldview presuppositions – themselves derived from *Scripture alone*. These presuppositions can be discovered in a careful hermeneutical process of discovery from Scripture, then checked by experience, the international community of Christ-followers, by logical coherency, and by correspondence to actual historical-grammatical exegesis. Sound logical deductions flowing back to the very nature of the Father and his living Logos-word can also be discovered as based on Scripture alone.⁵⁷ Now, it is also true that all languages use the Law of Contradiction and other logic principles codified by, for example, Aristotle. Yet even these logical principles can be found in Scripture and must be modified so as to never contradict what Scripture, the very truth of the God of truth, states and substantiates.⁵⁸

Christ and the Bible use the analogy-of-univocal-core method

“You are good and what you do is good” (Ps 119:68). We can know the character of Father-God based on what he does in our lives, reasoning from the economy to the immanent character of our Father. Scripture and especially Christ and the Apostles, hence, use this analogy-of-univocal-core method to make sound deductions. They do not use the analogy-of-equivocation methodology such as the S-DDS uses.⁵⁹ Several examples of this process are in order. Paul makes an analogy in his Corinthian correspondence that reasons from the function of the “spirit of man” back to the analogous functioning of the “Spirit of God.” From this, he comes to specific and knowable conclusions about the internal thoughts of Father-God that the Spirit searches out and then reveals to Paul and the other emissaries of Christ (1 Cor 2:11). The Psalmist analogically compares a good earthly father to our heavenly Father’s compassion: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (Ps 103:13-14 NIV). The Lord Jesus himself uses a similar father-Father analogy, even seeing a flash of the “image of God” within the shattered mirror of the Pharisees’ lives! “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Mt 7:11 NIV). A fourth example, interestingly enough compares a mother’s God-given instinct, derived from the *imago Dei*, to the tender love of our Father in heaven: “Can a woman forget her baby who nurses at her breast? Can she withhold compassion from the child she has borne? Even if mothers were to forget, I could never forget you!” (Is 49:15 NET).

Again, this analogy-of-univocal-core type of reasoning⁶⁰ does not give comprehensive knowledge but limited, specific, and true knowledge. Father-God created humanity in his image to think as he thinks. This remains true even though, as our Lord acknowledged above, humankind apart from him as the renewed Image of God, has fallen into rebellion with hardened darkness of heart. Father-God is incomprehensible for humanity only as to knowing him in his totality. However, because of revelation regenerate believers can know him at that exact points that he reveals to us. The Apostle John, along with all the biblical authors, are emphatic, then, that hu-

manity can possess mutual and interpersonal knowledge (γινώσκω) of the Father who first comes to know us (1 Cor 8:2; Gal 4:9).⁶¹ John hence is able to write: “I have written you, children, because you have come to know [ἐγνώκατε]⁶² the Father” – personally and relationally (1 Jn 2:13 CSB). In other words, we can know something exactly true with all the languages God created to be able to understand his written Word translated into the “vulgar [common non-Latin] language of every nation unto which they come” (WCF 1.8). God created these languages for humans to come to know him, otherwise all we can do is intuit him by mystical methodologies derived from natural theology not Scripture.⁶³ “To disciple all the peoples” means to communicate biblical truths about Father-God in comprehensible terms in each people-groups’ vernacular.

S-DDS “Analogically” Explains Away Accounts of Divine-Human Interaction

The basic presupposition of the S-DDS metaphysical theory is that true unity cannot exist with true diversity because the two are radically opposite so that the one and the many constantly war against each other as the Oneness principle seeks to absorb the Manyess (diversity) principle and vice versa.⁶⁴ The tradition prioritizes absolute simple-unity, the Simple One, as the totally-Other, so that absolutely no analogy at all exist with any created object. The divinity, thus is ineffable, without real description in God-created languages.

A scriptural Trinitarian view, on the other hand, teaches that if no intra-biblical interpretative keys indicate otherwise, clear statements about our interactive Father stand. Those statements ought of necessity to be taken univocally, yet *only* at the specific points of correspondence between the Creator and the creation that the Author intends. Nothing more or less than this is necessary, using, first, a process of coming to understand perhaps similar to the process needed to understand our Lord’s parables. Second, our Lord and the NT author’s often reason from creaturely things to the Creator by arguing from the lesser to the greater (i.e., “how much more,” e.g., Prv 11:31; Mt 7:11; Lk 12:24, 28; Rom 5:9, 10, 11:24; Heb 12:9). Clear Scripture language can be read in a straight-forward way, while keeping in mind the intention of the authors.

On the other hand, again, the S-DDS rationalizes away the many perspicuous and persistent biblical accounts of interaction between Father-God and humanity as mere anthropopathic and anthropomorphic analogies. In other words, the Tradition knows better than the clear revelation of the Scripture.⁶⁵ As seen, the divinity according to the S-DDS theory must be radically “wholly other,” differing absolutely and fundamentally from anything in the creation so that no physical object in this multi-verse of diversity can serve as a real analog of the simple Unity consisting of pure non-diversity. William F. Vallicella summarizes the S-DDS doctrine, “God is not only radically non-anthropomorphic, but radically non-creaturomorphic, not only in respect of the properties he possesses, but in his manner of possessing them. The simple God ... differs in his very ontology from any and all created beings.”⁶⁶

Paul R. Hinlicky in *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* is certainly correct, then, concerning Thomas Aquinas (and others in the tradition): “For Thomas divine simplicity is ... a cipher for apophatic transcendence.” Paradoxically, as he points out, Aquinas attempts a kataphatic (a positive biblical) description of this transcendence as comparable to creaturely being but being syncretistic (my term) and “unstable” (Hinlicky’s term) the “analogy collapses into equivocation.”⁶⁷ However, this universe is made up of objects possessing both real-unity-and-true-diversity at the same time like the Godhead, and hence *at certain univocal points* are able to analogically reflect the immanent Tri-Unity of the Father’s being. On the tradition’s account, use of anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms would actually be meaningless because they are grounded upon an analogy of equivocation and tell us nothing about what Father-God, actually is in his Being, fully interpenetrated as he is with the Word-Son and the Spirit.

When James Dolezal and others defend the classic S-DDS,⁶⁸ they seem to believe that any interaction between God and a creature is only an illusive-appearance of interaction but not a true revelation, an unveiling of the immanent nature of Father-God, which is hidden in mystery. “God alters the revelation of Himself without altering Himself ontologically.... The proper locus of all change is in the revelation of God—as it appears to us successively.”⁶⁹ Citing Bavinck, he claims that Scripture is “anthropomorphic through and through,” seemingly denying any true revelation because everything is accommodated. He continues, “the biblical depiction of change in God [is] ... figurative and accommodated expressions designed to convey something true about God, though not under a form of modality proper to Him.”⁷⁰ By this, he means that the perfect divine Being does not and cannot *really* interact or be revelatory through any creature. Logically, this must include through even the real humanity of Christ though he rejects the deduction. Any interaction with the creature is *appearance* only. The Docetic conclusions are necessary and only a form of syncretism can skirt the issue.

Summary: Scripture falsifies the D-DDS and its analogy-of-equivocation method

Ryan Mullins correctly concludes that few proponents actually realize how radical the underlying presupposition of the S-DDS dualism actually is.⁷¹ Some exact, univocal correspondence between the revealed economic nature of God the Father (with the Son, and Spirit) and the ontological Being of God must exist otherwise we know *nothing* at all about our Father. Our minds must be captive to God’s Word alone for interpretative keys because it is God’s own *self*-revelation. Every true analogy must have some basis of univocal comparison with the created world to have meaning at all. The creation including the creation of the written word reflects Father’s Triune nature. In other words, we possess revelation to be able to understand something about God. Paul’s principle of ‘antithesis’ means that the only common intellectual ground between a believer and unbeliever is God’s ground, which unbelievers attempt surreptitiously to pass off as their own wisdom. Only on the basis of what God has designed can we even have intelligent and understandable conversations with unbelievers about simplicity.

For S-DDS proponents, all analogies comparing something in this creation to the Creator are actually analogies of equivocation. Furthermore, the S-DDS teaches that both God’s revealed description of true diversity within God are only accommodative revelations of what only appears to be interactive change and diversity within God’s nature. The tradition claims certitude that this diversity is actually non-existent.⁷² Hence, Scripture itself, because it uses analogies-of-univocal-contact-point *falsifies* the S-DDS. It is *never* necessary to use the distorting lenses of that extra-biblical philosophy to understand our Father or divine nature. The one presupposing that perspicuous scriptural language about our relational Father is always “analogical-equivocal” bears the burden of proof to demonstrate that Scripture actually establishes simplicity.

It is clear, then, that at the core of the radical S-DDS worldview, biblical concepts of Father-God are syncretized with an alien philosophy not built on Christ (Col 2:2:2-4, 6-9 NIV). The Simplex of the philosophers is unsuccessfully mixed with the biblical description of the complex-simplicity⁷³ of God like olive oil and water shaken together. Certainly, found in this mix are pure droplets of the interactive Father-God of the Bible, who always-dwells with his Son and Spirit in a never-dissoluble triunity. However, the oil of the classical Simplex in this mixture is unnecessary, distorting the core Gospel message. Only the pure, core revelation of the Father (with the Son and Spirit) is sufficient and necessary for the correct contextualization of the Word in all the cultures of the earth. It destroys the Great Commission mandate to take this syncretism to the nations. Our Lord commanded us to teach only what he instructed. Yet, the S-DDS, as exemplified by Aquinas, but ultimately including all other weaker versions of the DDS, ascribe to

the “foolishness” of the Word of Christ only secondary authority *under* the supreme magisterial authority of the human tradition of simplicity. James Dolezal follows Paul Helm: “Classical Christian theism is a set of rules, a ‘grammatical template’ by which we are enabled to coherently hold together the diversity of biblical statements about God.”⁷⁴ The S-DDS divinity is disconcertingly similar to the neoplatonic Simplex,⁷⁵ borrowed from the Hellenistic milieu, while syncretizing that concept with the portrayal of the Father revealed in Scripture.

S-DDS Trinity is Not Compatible with Biblical Trinitarian Doctrine

The Philosophical Root of the Simplicity Dogma

I have alluded to much to the philosophical roots of the S-DDS but here we will discuss it more in depth. The doctrine of a simple Oneness was perhaps first represented in the ancient Greco-Roman world by Parmenides (A. Plantinga, C. Gunton),⁷⁶ continued through the Neo-Platonic tradition (“Plotinian neo-Platonic” – J. Frame, N. Wolterstorff, C. Plantinga)⁷⁷ and is very similar to other syncretistic wisdom traditions (e.g., Islamic, Jewish, Brahmanistic – D.B. Hart).⁷⁸ Both Hellenistic and Indic traditions, it seems, possessed an ancient consensus that the ultimate divinity is immortal, indissoluble, unchanging, and uniform.⁷⁹ Conservative Lutheran Theologian, Francis Pieper, is candid that the term “simplex” describes God (though he denies that the source is ancient philosophy, claiming it is actually Scripture): “Since finite human reason cannot comprehend the infinite and absolute simplex, God condescends to our weakness and in his Word divides Himself, as it were, into a number of attributes which our faith can grasp and to which it can cling.” Diverse characteristics are only appearance (“as it were”) but are only an “accommodation to the laws of human thought processes or logic,” but are not actually real because within the simplex “the essence and the divine attributes are absolutely identical.”⁸⁰

It is clearly impossible for a truly simple divinity to possess any actual diversity, parts or accidents at all.⁸¹ Respected philosophical theologian, Katherin Rogers, agrees: “With God we do not hypothesize any unity underlying the diversity because there is no diversity.”⁸² Rogers’ explanation of divinity attempts to describe the unspeakable in human terms that do not and indeed *cannot* really describe the ineffable. Hence, according to the S-DDS, no real distinction exists between any of the various Scripture-revealed character and attribute properties because no true distinctions *can* exist within a Simplex and especially between the divinity’s essence and God-self’s existence. The divinity, thus, must be identical to his/her/its attributes,⁸³ as St. Augustine reminds us – though illogically, it seems to me, excluding the true diversity of the three Persons: “And this Trinity is one God; and none the less simple because a Trinity. [And] ... the nature of the good is simple ... because it is what it has, with the exception of the relation of the persons to one another.”⁸⁴ According to the S-DDS, no metaphysical spatiality, motion or sequence, and certainly no metaphysical diversity of various truly distinct character attributes as revealed in Scripture actually exist within the Simple One.

Richard Bauckham, as seen above, demonstrates the stark contrast with the biblical view. He continues, “The essential element of ... Jewish monotheism ... puts [YHWH] in a class of his own, a wholly different class from any other heavenly or supernatural beings” as sole totally independent Creator and Ruler of all things (Neh 9:6). This wholly different class of Being is not a mental abstraction nor an ontological distinction of pure unity in contradistinction to creaturely many-ness. Instead, the distinction consists of Father-God’s “transcendent uniqueness.”

Especially important for identifying this ... are statements that distinguish YHWH by means of a unique relationship to the whole of reality: YHWH alone is Creator of all

things, whereas all other things are created by him; YHWH alone is the sovereign Lord of all things, whereas all other things serve or are subject to his universal lordship.”⁸⁵

Ancient dualism

The fundamental presupposition behind the S-DSS and its variants is that of Greek dualism. Katherine Rogers summarizes this development flowing out of the ancient problem of the relationship of the one and the many.

It was the fact that Thales concluded that there must be some fundamental unity underlying the multiplicity of the world of experience that made him a philosopher, after all. The view that simplicity is a perfection, implying immutability and incorruptibility, was established by the time of Parmenides and found its fullest expression in the Neoplatonic system of Plotinus who considered the term “One” to be the least inadequate name for the source of all. When the great religious thinkers of the middle ages strove to produce a systematic world-view synthesizing divine revelation and Greek philosophy they made the absolute simplicity of God the keystone of their intellectual structure.⁸⁶

S-DDS is, thus, based on a “synthesis,” or better, syncretism, founded upon dualist philosophy postulating a strong antithetical dialectic between the one (“fundamental unity underlying the multiplicity of the world of experience”) and manyness (“multiplicity of ... experience”). Such dualism teaches that only two dialectical opposite substances exist in the universe: Total simple unity and complete diversity or multiplicity.

Herman Dooyeweerd correctly calls this non-Trinitarian dualism the common *grondmotief* (foundational culture-theme) of Western philosophy and religion for at least two millennia. It blinds the eyes of philosophers of this age, as Paul warned. I continue to maintain that it abandons *sola Scriptura*, its teaching of redemptive historical development (a restorative eschatology principle), and its Trinitarian Principle of the “equal ultimacy of the one and the many” within the Being of the Father. The S-DDS syncretism presupposes the priority of a unity without any real diversity and then its proponents read Scripture through those lenses. According to Paul’s prescient warning, the S-DDS syncretic mixture seems to have taken scholastic theology “captive through ... deceptive philosophy, which depends [not] ... on Christ” (Col 2:8 NIV; see 1 Tim 4:1-8; 1 Jn 4:1-8). The ancient (Neo-)Platonic dualism believes that true unity cannot exist with true diversity because the two are radical opposites. Each constantly wars against each other principle, moving in one or the other direction when humans prioritize unity or diversity as logically or ontologically prior to the other.⁸⁷ The result of prioritizing of absolute simple-unity is that the simple divinity is absolutely indescribable. Ryan Mullins correctly states that few S-DDS proponents actually realize how radical the underlying presuppositions of their dualism are.⁸⁸

Now, to be a somewhat biblical Christian, certain revealed distinctions between the three persons must be added to the S-DDS, otherwise a Simplist is merely a Modalist. In other words, to create personal, metaphysical “distinct space” for a Trinity of persons within such an absolutely non-diverse, simple Being, S-DDS advocates merge the Neo-Platonic Simplex with some Scriptural insights in an unsteady synthesis. This mixture is an attempt to solve the cognitive dissonance coming from absorbing the Greco-Roman dualist assumption and biblical doctrine of the Trinity. The traditional and unconsciously accepted consensus has continued into modern theology and Christianized culture, as Herman Dooyeweerd and some of his most biblical disciples such as Albert Wolters demonstrate.⁸⁹

However, Scripture does not prioritize the simple oneness of God above the true diversity of God as the S-DDS theory does. God, consequently, only can be meaningfully known as the

God revealed in the canonical books, as the Prophets state over and over again. Any other god beside the one true God is an invention of humanity's very fertile and always rebellious speculation (Rom 1:21-22; Eph 4:17-18). Instead of prioritizing the simple oneness of God, Scripture presupposes throughout its warp and woof the "equal ultimacy of the one and the many" within the Godhead as C.A. Van Til states:

Using the language of the One-and-Many question we contend that in God the one and the many are equally ultimate. Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity, and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another. The Son and the Spirit are ontologically on a par with the Father.⁹⁰

The sacred writings, thus, portray our Father as possessing true diversity of character qualities yet at the same time also dwelling within ever-living oneness of true Spirit-Being with the Son and the Spirit. Hence, God possesses both the truly diverse properties of, for example, love and justice. In other words, his character is very compassionate and healing (Ex 15:26, 34:6-7; Ps 103:1-3), yet always just (Dt 32:4; Ezra 9:15; Is 5:16; Mal 2:17; 1 Jn 1:9). Furthermore, the Scripture derived doctrine that Father-God has always possessed real-unity-and-true-diversity at the same time within himself is what Samuel Coleridge termed the idea controlling all other ideas.⁹¹ It is the foundational and inescapable presupposition of thought in the universe created to reflect the glory of the Three-One Godhead. A person seeking to deny the truth uses it unconsciously in order to deny it.⁹² In other words, the statement, "I deny that true unity and real diversity are necessary" makes a meaningful, unified statement using the morphemic diversity of sounds to produce the meaning.

Worship Relationship of the Triune God with His Creatures

Finally, third, the simplicity doctrine does not evoke true worship as some claim. Only an interactive Father-God, ever-dwelling in real-unity with and within the true-diversity of the Word ("the Lamb") and the seven-fold Spirit, is the proper *goal* of awe, glory, and worship (e.g., Jude 24; Rev 1:17, 4:9-11, 5:1-14). To the Father, through the Son by the Spirit is the normal revealed order of the worship of the Triune God (see e.g., Eph 1:3-14, 3:14-21; 2 Cor 1:3). A non-diverse simplicity may perhaps evoke an awesome mystery of the numinous, what Rudolf Otto described as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.⁹³ As utter voiceless mystery, the "numinous" must be totally and absolutely "Wholly Other" – so different that no analogy exists. But such trembling and fascination is the same feeling a Hindu devotee will give to the ineffable Brahman. Is it any wonder that Hindu's turn to idols to express their devotion? Could this help explain how much graven image, iconic, and mental idolatries (e.g., Col 3:5) we see throughout the old, apostate Christendom?

So, according to Otto, such mystical contemplation evokes a reaction of silence. Yet humans need to verbally proclaim their honor, thanks and praise to their Creator and Father (Rom 1:21, 25). The Psalms are full of this theme. Further, the divinity of Otto and the S-DDS does not produce the terror of a treasonous rebel standing before a good, yet holy and just Sovereign Creator as when Isaiah stood before Yahweh-Jesus at the time of his call to become a prophet (Is 6; Jn 12:41). Instead the S-DDS teaching provokes angst because that divinity presents itself as an overpowering Supremely Ineffable. Yet, everyone fears judgment and death, because they know that "those who do these things deserve to die" and that they are captive to the inevitable death and subsequent condemnation that come after it, as Paul and the writer of the Hebrews re-

minds us (Rom 1:32, 2:16; Heb 2:14, 9:24). Finally, the Otto's numinous presents itself as *fascinating*, because the non-diverse divinity of the S-DDS is absolutely outside of our diverse reality. As D. B. Hart states, as we have seen, this describes all mystical faiths but has nothing whatsoever to do with biblical Father (*contra*, e.g., Gavin Ortlund, and Pui Him Ip).⁹⁴

True worship comes only from honoring the Father through his Spirit and truth in both word and deed (Jn 4:24; 1 Jn 3:18). Worship includes verbal praise of his many diverse character qualities of goodness, mercy, justice, compassion, and so forth. Glorifying our Father-God in Scripture is accompanied with music, clapping, singing, hand raising, shouting, dance, trumpets, hand drums, and stringed instruments because he is, was, and ever-will be the same gracious, just, and relational Father with the Word made flesh, and his personally-experienced Spirit. The stoicized worship of the Simplex in silent trembling before an Incomprehensible has nothing in common with biblical worship. The only way to have both is to introduce *some measure of syncretism*.

The biblical triune Father, Son, and Spirit are the proper subject of worship but in proper order: "For through him [the exalted Christ] we both [Jews and those of the idolatrous peoples] have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Eph 2:18). We must not worship this august Triune God, with the Greco-Roman civilization's "golden calf," analogous to what Jeroboam introduced to Israel. This calf, we are told, must not be abandoned lest we abandon the Tradition and become idolaters. James Dolezal terms this a "mutualist understanding of God." "Such a God," he claims, "is inevitably mutable and finite and as such is unworthy of worship."⁹⁵ Then so be it but defined by Scripture not the Tradition because an absolutely immutable, totally-stoic, impassionate and simple divinity, being incapable of interaction, cannot be thanked, glorified, trusted, loved, served, or communicated with *without syncretism* with "the deception" (τῶ ψεύδει, the lie; see context of Rom 1:18-25).

Anti-Trinitarian Simplicity is Contextualization Gone Awry

In conclusion, the Father-God of Scripture cannot be known comprehensively (Ps 139:6; Isa 55:8-9). But he can be known exactly at the several points which he reveals himself in himself and in the economy of creation and redemption (e.g., Gal 4:9; 1 Cor 8:2-3). This is sufficient unto a comprehensive salvation with ramifications both for the visible and invisible time-space realms. It is also sufficient to give a framework⁹⁶ of truth within which to build an adequate worldview in order to fulfill the Cultural Mandate and its new covenant restatement, the Great Commission. To answer another potential pejorative accusation, to be in relationship with the Scripture's complex-unified Father does not necessitate resorting to speculative views of divinity that both Process Theology (PT) and the Openness of God Theology (OGT) envision. Both correctly see syncretism in the classical view and Neoplatonic views of divinity, yet vastly over-contextualize by going far beyond that which is written (1 Cor 4:6) in order to personalize God and make him interactive. The divinity of the OGT and PT is syncretistic.⁹⁷

In other words, if the biblical accounts are read in a careful yet straightforward manner without the template of simplicity, Father-God's true unity and real diversity dwells within mutual intra-Trinitarian, comprehensive knowledge shared between the Three (e.g., 1 Cor 2:10-16; Rom 8:27; Mt 11:27). Father, thus, is able to fully know both the unifying and diversifying aspects life in himself and also, by deduction, outside in the creation (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1-3). This implies that Father both possesses the truly diverse qualities such as truth, justice and love and always has mutually shared them with the Son and Spirit. Each quality is distinct and not equivalent as the classic, almost-monist doctrine of simplicity teaches.⁹⁸ Each of these qualities are not

“parts” of God. Instead, all inseparably coinhere and interpenetrate one another within the One-Three, Three-One that is Father-God’s single Life. Hence, in a comprehensive sense true-distinction-and-real-unity dwell together without dialectical tension within the Godhead.

Therefore, the classic teaching on simplicity (with its subsidiary doctrines of strong immutability, impassibility, and atemporality) is surely contextualization gone awry, a syncretistic mixture of Greek and Christian presuppositions that cannot be supported biblically. It is by definition philosophically incoherent to human *analytical* thought (as Neo-Platonic and Gnostic religious philosophies in the West, and Vedic, and Buddhist religious philosophies in the East clearly understand). The Tradition in both East and West prioritizes the One over the Three.⁹⁹

Hence, because most all ancient Simplists believe that their version of the Simplex-divinity can only possess one “thought,” one “pure act,” one “unwavering immutability” the only way to experience this divinity is to gain a mystical beatific vision of the One. It/she/he is Totally Other, absolutely ontologically different with no point of contact with this creation. The Veda’s recognize this, many branches of Buddhism understands, but not the S-DDS adherents because they live, it seems, in a blinded world of syncretism. It is that serious.

Simplists in the apostolic church against which Paul and John struggled seemed to have understood as well. Piecing together biblical data, it seems they also believed that the one-divinity must be intuited holistically and mystically, and that they prioritized unity over diversity (see e.g., 1 Jn 1:1-4; 4:1-7; Col 2:1-10, 20-23; 1 Cor 1-3, et al). Even one branch of the proto-Gnostics, which John combated, refused to acknowledge that diversity of mundane things such as morality even mattered because of their esoteric gnosis of the non-diverse-One (see 1 Jn 1:5-6, 2:4, 15-17, et al). These proto-gnosticized Docetics, further, realized that the Simplex could not become truly incarnate or be interactively involved in the world of time and space (see 1 Jn 1:1-4, 4:1-7. Et a);). These schismatics, who left the *apostolic* consensus (1 Jn 2:19; 2 Jn 7-10), refused to see the reality of the true Father-Son distinction (1 Jn 2:22, 23, 24) within the anointing presence of the Holy Spirit by whom we alone have true gnosis (1 Jn 2:2). John states that any rejection of the true interactive distinction of the Father, Son and Spirit and the rejection of the incarnation comes from the “spirit of the antichrist” (1 Jn 4:2b-3) and the “spirit of error” (1 Jn 4:6b). It was, thus, an easy conclusion for such gnosticized Simplists to reject the incarnation and in other contexts, the resurrection of the diverse-physical body (1 Cor 15).

Scripture teaches that Father-God, however, can only be known in the Son (Mt 11:27) through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-11). All people know through the diversity of what is seen the divine power and divine nature (θειότης) of the Creator. All humanity is thus without any excuse, especially when each person stands before the throne of God in Christ (Rom 1:20, 2:1, 6, 3:19, 14:10-11; 2 Cor 5:10). Scripture does describe accurately our truly personal yet invisible Father-God dwelling in unapproachable light as he actually is in himself (1 Tim 6:15-16), contrary to S-DDS presuppositions. While he is the Totally Unique God, separate from his creation, “the blessed and only Ruler, the King of Kings and Lord of lords,” yet he still delights to interact with humans in created time and space. He numbers all our hairs and knows when each sparrow falls to the ground (Mt 10:29-30). Even the animals of the field look to him for food and shelter (Pss 104:13, 145:16). Our Father-God is ever-alive, rejoicing, laughing, longing for his wayward wife (or son – depending upon the metaphor),¹⁰⁰ grieving, angered, compassionate, defending the weak and helpless, loving, passionate about his glory and just, yet always gracious (see e.g., Ex 33:18-19, 34:5-8; Jon 4:2). He responds to us and answers our prayers (see e.g., Gen 29:33; Ps 28:2, 6; Heb 5:7). We have not because we ask not (Jas 4:2).

Jesus, the God-Man, shows us who and what this invisible Father-God is like. He is a living analogy of the Father (Jn 14:5-11). Our Lord was interactive, personal, emotive, holy, pure, just, “mighty in power,” and interacting with us in the incarnation in cosmic physical time and is now from divine metaphysical time. In other words, Jesus reveals the personal and interactive Father, *par excellence* (Jn 12:44-49). As the self-testimony of our relational Father-God (יהוה – Ps 19:7), Scripture is the trustworthy self-revelation of his wisdom, glory and name. These descriptions are, thus, not mere anthropomorphic and anthropopathic maya-illusions with reality being different. The Logos and the Spirit share this selfsame interactive Glory-Name with the Father (see Jn 17:5) because though “these three are one,”¹⁰¹ just as Scripture teaches that Jesus and his Father “are one,” (Jn 10:30), yet they are also truly three.

This kind of distinct and personal interactivity is not, by definition, what the Plotinian-classic divinity is able to do – unless one spends countless pages of philosophical discourse to explain away and/or attempt to syncretize the Bible’s God with the divinity of the idolatrous philosophers of both the East and West. The sola Scriptura principle teaches us that any believer in any people-group on earth can grasp these truths in personal experience as one hears Father-God speak with the Good Shepherd’s voice directly through the pages of Scripture by the teaching of the Spirit (e.g., Ps 119:160; Jer 23:28-36; John 17:17). Humans are interactive and inter-relational beings because we are in his image. Certainly, he alone is “the only wise God (Rom 16:27), the only morally perfect Father (Mt 5:48), unchangeable in his core attributes (Ps 55:19; Mal 3:6), and possessing unbounded Spirit-power (John 4:24; see Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17, 27; Zec 8:6). That Spirit-power we do not possess because we are mere totally dependent creatures (“flesh” – Acts 14:15; Is 31:3), yet we can know him. He is not ineffable. Biblical Christians, hence, do not trust in Tradition *and* Scripture.

Last, it seems best, then, not to impose upon Scripture any extra-biblical philosophical speculations concerning divinity. Instead we are enjoined to be still and experience that he alone is Father-God; to listen with respect to him actually speaking in his Word by the Spirit, and to share that Good News to the ends of the earth. This biblical Father alone – not the Simplex-syncretism – is integral to the Gospel message with which we are mandated to disciple all peoples. We must not set aside the clear Word for human tradition not founded upon Christ, robbing us of the experiential knowledge of “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our troubles,” exchanging him for a “worthless nothing” (אֵלֵּיִם) and “the lie” (τὸ ψεύδει) (2 Cor 1:3-4; Ps 96:5; Rom 1:23, 25). It is time, then, to revise the Tradition in an international hermeneutical community without compromising the integrity of the biblical Trinity or the hypostatic union of the Scripture’s Christ.

Appendix

Ladd: Platonic Roots

“While Plato in this way locates moral evil in the soul, it is in that part of the soul that was created with the body and, like the body, is mortal. Most of the time, Plato speaks of the soul as simple in essence, and as the enemy of the body with its appetites and passions. ‘The soul is most like the divine ... immortal ... intellectual ... indissoluble and unchanging, and the body, on the contrary, most like the human ... mortal ... multiform ... unintellectual ... dissoluble and ever-changing.’ [Phaedo 80B] The soul partakes of the nature of the divine, which Plato understands to consist of [unchanging forms] such qualities as beauty, wisdom, and goodness [Phaedrus 246E], which have objective existence in the realm of the invisible and incorporeal. The

soul, then, belongs to the noumenal world and descends from this higher world into the phenomenal world of bodily existence whence it strives to regain its proper place in the higher world.

.....
 In a real sense of the word, salvation for Plato is by knowledge [gnosis].”¹⁰²

Latourette: The Greek Menace

“Scarcely had the course of events make it clear that Christianity was not to lose its distinctive message by absorption into the parent Judaism when the faith was confronted with an even great menace. As it moved out into the non-Jewish world it was in danger of so far conforming to that environment that it would sacrifice the essential features of the Gospel. The threat was especially acute from Hellenism and the atmosphere of the Hellenistic world....

The danger was not conformity to polytheism, for against that Christians were quite adamant. It was more subtle and therefore more to be feared. It was the incorporation of some of the attitudes of the Hellenistic mind. One of these was the confidence in philosophy as the way to truth, or, in a less thoroughgoing conformity, the attempt to think through and present the Gospel in the categories of Greek philosophy. In the process the Gospel might be distorted or obscured. Another was the sharp disjunction between spirit and matter which was a basic assumption of much of Hellenism. This seemed to have come into Greek thought through the Orphic movement centuries before Christ. It was perpetuated through Platonism and Neoplatonism. By its presence in that cultural tradition, it had so moulded the thinking and the attitudes of Christian converts from a Hellenistic background that it often came over with them. Through them and the continued study of Platonism and Neoplatonism it has persisted in the thought, practice, and worship of a large proportion of Christians.

In contrast with [most Jews and] ... Jesus himself, this attitude regarded matter, including flesh, as evil, and pure [simple] spirit as good. It conceived of man as a compound of flesh and spirit. To it, therefore, the goal of every man’s striving must be salvation by the emancipation of the spirit from the contamination of the flesh. Here was a way of accounting for the presence of evil, that perennial problem for thoughtful and sensitive souls, which made a great appeal and had sufficient resemblance to the issue present by the incarnation and the cross to attract many Christians. Again and again we shall find it as a recurring theme in the asceticism, thought, and mysticism of those who have borne the Christian name, among them some of the most devoted ... men and women who have been esteemed ideal exemplars of the Christian faith.”¹⁰³

¹ This article follows on Mark R. Kreitzer, “Rescuing the Doctrine of Father-God from Contextualization Gone Awry: God and Time as a Test Case of Syncretism [Rescuing],” *Global Missiology* 4, no. 13 (2016), accessed June 26, 2019, <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1911>. Forthcoming articles are intended along the theme of “Syncretism and True Contextualization,” the next one entitled “God is not Simple: Toward a Proper Theology. Restoring the Doctrine of Father-God from Contextualization Gone Awry 2.”

² The technical term “perichōrēsis” (περιχώρησις) or “circumincession” (circumincessio) is based on the concept found in passages such as John 10:30, 17:22, 21, 22, 23, which emphasize true-unity-yet-real-personal-diversity as the Father and Son mutually indwell and interpenetrate one another, sharing all things. It is best illustrated, accurately though not comprehensively, by the three dimensions of infinite space (Eph 3:14-19).

³ He is actually omnitemporal, see Mark R. Kreitzer, “Rescuing the Doctrine of Father-God from Contextualization Gone Awry: God and Time as a Test Case of Syncretism [Rescuing],” *Global Missiology* 4, no. 13 (2016), accessed June 26, 2019, <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1911>.

⁴ Possibly, the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, as a Hebrew imperfect, means, “I will be who/what I will be,” implying that Father-God is not as absolutely temporally immutable as the Thomist *actus purus* teaching implies.

Granted, however, Father-God seems to share a single divine nature with the Son and Spirit (Θείας ... φύσεως), a fact mentioned, it seems, only twice directly in 2 Peter 1:3 and then in Acts 17:29 (τὸ Θεῖον) and

obliquely in Galatians 4:8 concerning idols that do not possess true divine existence or “divine being” (τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὐσι θεοῖς) and faintly perhaps in 1 Corinthians 8:4 (οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς), see 5-6 and Romans 1:20 (θειότης). That nature cannot change in core attributes (Mal 3:6; Num 23:19; Ps 102:25-27; etc.).

⁵ See excellent discussion in John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Foundations of Evangelical Theology) [NOLH] (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 264-276. Therefore, God experiences change but “those changes do not compromise his immutable person, will, purposes, or ethical norms” (Feinberg, NOLH, 276).

⁶ See, George Eldon Ladd, “The Background of the Pattern: Hebrew or Greek,” in *The Pattern of New Testament Truth* [Pattern] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 17, italics added.

See also, Kenneth Scott Latourette, “The Greek Menace,” *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 122-123. For both relevant sections of both Ladd and Latourette, see Appendix.

⁷ Cornelius A. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* [Defense] (Philadelphia: P&R, 1955), 42.

⁸ I have attempted this with atemporality, see Kreitzer, Rescuing.

⁹ A. Scott Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed., A. Scott Moreau, s.v., “Syncretism” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000).

¹⁰ James Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness* [GWP] (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 31.

¹¹ Paul R. Hinlicky, *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* [Simplicity] (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 43.

¹² See Steven Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology) (London: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2016), 182, italics added.

¹³ Duby, *Simplicity*, 181, italics added.

¹⁴ The classic view of God is found in Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. “It is marked by a strong commitment to the doctrines of divine aseity, immutability, impassibility, simplicity and eternity, and the substantial unity of the divine persons. The underlying and inviolable conviction is that God does not derive any aspect of His being from outside Himself and is not in any way caused to be” (Dolezal, *ATIIG*, 1). When Scripture portrays God as mutable, as able to feel with his creatures, and as omnitemporal, it is translated through the lens of the DDS and are termed merely metaphorical and anthropomorphic (Dolezal, *ATIIG*, 85-86).

¹⁵ James E. Dolezal, *GWP*, 31.

¹⁶ Ryan T. Mullins, *Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity* [Simply Impossible], *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7, 2013: 181. Barrett dismisses this out of hand as unproven. However, first, it is a logical concomitant and second, most all classic Simplists accept the connection (see nt. 13) (Jordan Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Emerging Scholars) [Simplicity] (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 13, n. 38.

¹⁷ Charles Dubray, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1907, s.v., “Actus Purus,” (New York: Robert Appleton), accessed June 14, 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01125b.htm>.

¹⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1: 329, quoted in Duby, *Simplicity*, 181, note my editing of Barth.

¹⁹ For example, see David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* [Experience of God] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 30; see also 4, 248.

²⁰ Robert Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (New York: Putnam, 1961).

²¹ Dolezal, *ATIIG*, xv.

²² Paul Helm, “Perfect Being Theology.” *Helm’s Deep: Philosophical Theology Blog*, October 01, 2010, accessed November 24, 2018. <https://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2010/10/perfect-being-theology.html>.

²³ Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Reason and Religion EUP) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000). For a much more biblically consistent alternative, in my opinion, see Yujin Nagasawa. *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁴ Duby, *Simplicity*, 81, see also 86.

²⁵ Jordan Barrett, *Simplicity*, 166.

²⁶ Steven Duby responds to Peter Leithart’s critique of his basic thesis in *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* that “unity is superior to diversity” with regard to Theology Proper. Duby claims that Leithart’s basic anti-Thomist claim denies that “all the perfections found in creation ... ‘pre-exist’ in a more eminent and united way in God.” In other words, for Duby simplicity as non-distinct and total unity is self-evident. He does not base this presupposition upon Scripture but upon an unjustified intuition. “This is one of those basic insights into the nature of reality that it is difficult for us to avoid.” He continues, “briefly, if there were really distinct parts or perfections in God, then the aseity and ultimacy of God would be compromised.” Instead of presupposing what the Scripture presupposes that the Name means “the one who was, is, and is to come” (Rev 1:8, et al), he claims that unaided human reason can describe the ineffable divine nature. The Bible, on the other hand, describes our Father as the one who “[just] is” and

“the living One,” who possesses within his single being true diversity of persons and attributes. The one who stands only upon this biblical rock, Duby claims, is misguided and “reassign[s] the ultimacy of God to an impersonal modal structure, a brute necessity that determines who God is.” This is pure assertion. His foundational presupposition is one shared by many in the ancient dualist consensus and is parochial and cultural *not* universal. The result is syncretistic-Christian philosophizing not “Christian philosophy” as his title claims. (Steven J. Duby, “In Defense of Christian Philosophy: A Response to Peter Leithart [Defense],” *The Davenant Institute Blog*, December 28, 2018, accessed June 26, 2019, <https://davenantinstitute.org/defense-of-christian-philosophy>), 8.

²⁷ Mark R. Kreitzer, “Towards a Biblical Philosophy of Science [Philosophy of Science],” *Christianity and Science: The Biannual Journal of the Kuiper Foundation* 17, no. 2 (Winter 2007); 6-20. <http://kuiperfoundation.squarespace.com/christianity-and-society/2013/9/27/volume-17-no-2.html>.

²⁸ Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity. The 1992 Bampton Lectures* [The One, the Three] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7.

²⁹ Kreitzer, Philosophy of Science.

³⁰ An unnamed reviewer did this repeatedly in his or her comments upon an earlier version of this paper.

³¹ See e.g., 1) John Frame, “Antithesis and the Doctrine of Scripture” [Inaugural lecture on assuming the J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, FL.], May 15, 2012, accessed June 28, 2019, <https://frame-poythress.org/antithesis-and-the-doctrine-of-scripture/>. 2) Greg Bahnsen, “At War with the Word – The Necessity of Biblical Antithesis” [At War] (Van Til Lectures at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA), 1987, accessed June 28, 2019, <https://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa083.htm>. Found also in Greg Bahnsen, *Antithesis* 1, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 1990). See also Greg Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis, The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*, ed. Gary DeMar (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007).

³² See a recent flawed defense of natural theology: David Haines, “Natural Theology and Protestant Orthodoxy,” in *God of Our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church*, ed. Bradford Littlejohn (Moscow, ID: Davenant Institute), 53-86.

³³ Duby, Defense, 11.

³⁴ Duby, Defense, 10.

³⁵ See Kreitzer, Philosophy of Science, 11.

³⁶ “Ψυχικὸς δὲ ἄνθρωπος οὐ δέχεται τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ, μωρία γὰρ αὐτῷ ἐστίν, καὶ οὐ δύναται γινῶναι, ὅτι πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται” – the soulish/natural man does not receive the things [taught] by the Spirit because they are foolishness to him. Indeed, they are not able to come to know them because they are discerned by the Spirit” (my translation) (1 Cor 2:14).

³⁷ Duby, Defense, 10.

³⁸ Paul Helm, “Foreword,” in *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* [GWP], James Dolezal (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), xi. See also, 1) Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 3: The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); 2) James E. Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* [GWP] (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 3) James Dolezal, *All that is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* [ATIIG] (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017) and 4) Duby, Simplicity.

³⁹ Ladd, Pattern, 12-13. See also Herman Dooyeweerd, *The Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options* (Grand Rapids: Paideia Press/Reformational Publishing Project, 2012).

For example, along with recent authors, S. Duby and Jordan Barrett, early 20th century Dutch theologian, Herman Bavinck, attempted to syncretize the Greco-Roman simplicity view with Scripture, analogous to what the Corinthian believers seemed to have attempted in Paul's day. Bavinck summarizes: “Simplicity is of great importance, nevertheless, for our understanding of God.” Then, he asserts without exegesis: “It is not only taught in Scripture (where God is called “light,” “life,” and “love”).” This leads him to state his Perfect Being presupposition, “but also automatically follows from the idea of God and is necessarily implied in other attributes.” Next, he defines the doctrine: “Simplicity here is the antonym of ‘compounded.’ If God is composed of parts, like a body, or composed of genus (class) and differentiae (attributes of different species belonging to the same genus), substance and accidents, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, essence and existence, then his perfection, oneness, independence, and immutability cannot be maintained.” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (Volume 2), ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 176.

All of this implies that Bavinck prioritizes absolute non-diverse unity in the divine being over any diversity by assuming the Platonic-Parmenidean definition. This is contrary to the biblical Trinitarian teaching that within Father-God's Being dwells true unity and real diversity (e.g., as deduced from Mt 28:19; Jn 1:1, 10:30; etc.)

⁴⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 24.

⁴¹ Clinton Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

⁴² It seems, he was deliberately combating them in several passages, such as “Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely named knowledge” [τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως, derived from γνῶσις (gnosis)]” (1 Tim 6:20, see also 1 Tim 4:1-8). Like Paul, John also polemicized against such proto-gnostic teachers channeling similar anti-Christian doctrines taught by false-spirits (1 Jn 1:1-4, 4:1-7).

⁴³ In the context of his battle against the Judaizers and Proto-Gnostics, Paul used very strong language. Any message to reveal God, not built upon Christ alone and especially him crucified, is either syncretistic falsehood propagated by the blinding rabbinical consensus of that era (2 Cor 3); or is blatant and culpable deception communicated by those whose consciences have been seared, taught by demons, and who are walking in the way of rebels, standing in the path of law-breakers, and sitting in the seat of scoffers (Ps 1:1; Eph 4:17-21; 1 Tim 4:1-7; Col 2:2-9). Anyone bringing other Gospel, even from an angel of heaven, deserves a curse (ἀνάθεμα) (Gal 1:8-9).

⁴⁴ Only sola Scriptura based biblical theology can accurately describe the historical actions and Scriptural revelation of Father-God revealed in the economy. Based upon only that Scriptural revelation are we able to reason back to the immanent person of Father-God, his only-begotten-firstborn Son and their mutual Spirit. Only through direct statements and “good and necessary consequence,” can we gain *some* exact, but never comprehensive, knowledge then of the hidden-but-now revealed things of God.

⁴⁵ The principle applies, naturally, to physical and biological science tradition of the scientific “elders” including “natural philosophy” such as evolutionary naturalism and theistic evolution.

⁴⁶ This Gospel proclaims the divine Lord, the King, and especially him “crucified.” It remains a message that is mad folly to the idolatrous Greeks and pathetic weakness to the Jews, who idolized a conquering Messiah, refusing to glorify a King, who humiliated himself by entering their beloved city on a “colt, the foal of a [female] donkey” not on a conqueror’s white stallion (Mt 21:5 AV; 1 Cor 1:20-25, see esp. 1:21 and 2:2; but see Rev 19:11).

⁴⁷ Ryan T. Mullins, “Review of *All That Is In God: Evangelical Theology And The Challenge Of Classical Christian Theism* by James E. Dolezal, *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* [JBTS], accessed June 27, 2019, <http://jbtsonline.org/review-of-all-that-is-in-god-evangelical-theology-and-the-challenge-of-classical-christian-theism-by-james-e-dolezal/>.

⁴⁸ Dolezal, ATIIG, xv.

⁴⁹ Steven J. Duby, “Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account” [Simplicity Thesis] (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, 2014), 240-241, accessed June 28, 2019, <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/5935>.

⁵⁰ Mark Husbands, “The Trinity is Not our Social Program: Volf, Nyssa and Barth,” in *Rediscovering the Trinity: Classic Doctrine and Contemporary Ministry*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove: Apollos/IVP, 2009), 121, 122, 123.

⁵¹ See 1) Gunton, *The One, the Three*. Note, in addition, 2) Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The One and Many Problem – The Contribution of Van Til*. In *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan, 339-348 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1971), and 3) R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: The Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2007).

⁵² Duby, Simplicity Thesis, 242.

⁵³ Duby, Simplicity Thesis, 243.

⁵⁴ I hold to an analogy of a univocal core, and I do not agree with everything in the following articles, their point still is correct. Without some aspect of univocity, there is nothing but gnostic subjective intuition but not true and exact, but never comprehensive, knowledge of Father-God. See e.g., 1) Jordan Wessling, “Colin Gunton, Divine Love, and Univocal Predication,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013). 2) William P. Alston, “Aquinas on Theological Predication: A Look Backward and a Look Forward,” in Eleonore Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith*, 145-178 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). 3) Richard Cross, “Idolatry and Religious Language,” *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008): 190-196; 4) Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33-39; and 5) Thomas Williams, “The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutory,” *Modern Theology* 21 (2005), 575-585.

⁵⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 6, italics added.

⁵⁶ This rule now called, “Rahner’s Rule,” needs some modifications, but still it stands solid among biblical theologians. For a good introduction, see Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner’s Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Issues in Systematic Theology) (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).

⁵⁷ Note that I am not speaking here about *solo Scriptura* – only Scripture, but *sola Scriptura* – Scripture is the primary and final source of authority.

⁵⁸ For one attempt to do just this, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁵⁹ Aquinas speaks of three methods for knowledge of the holy, univocal method, analogy method, and the equivocal method. He claims that his method is the second, yet because he believes in an ineffable divinity, it is actually the equivocal method under the guise of analogy. If divinity is inexpressible, no analogy can give any real knowledge of divinity whatsoever (see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, Q. 13). For a good introduction to the topic, using other terms than what I have coined, see E. Jennifer Ashworth, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), ed., Edward N. Zalta, s.v., “Medieval Theories of Analogy,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/analogy-medieval/>, accessed June 24, 2019. See especially the section on “Problems in Logic, Theology, and Metaphysics”: “Twelfth-century theologians ... explored the problem of divine language in depth. Their work initially sprang from works on the Trinity by Augustine and Boethius. These authors insisted that God is absolutely simple, so that no distinctions can be made between God’s essence and his existence, or between one perfection, such as goodness, and another, such as wisdom, or, more generally, between God and his properties. ... These theologians insisted on God’s absolute transcendence, and on what came to be called negative [apophatic] theology. We cannot affirm anything positive about God, because no affirmation can be appropriate to a transcendent being. ... Can we say that God is just and that Peter is just as well? For our purposes, this last question is the most important, for it raises the question of one word used of two different realities.”

⁶⁰ On God and univocal language, see note 52.

⁶¹ Greek “γνώσκω,” German “kennen” and English “ken” are cognates, meaning “personal knowledge.”

⁶² The perfect implies having come to know in the past and possessing ongoing relational knowledge in the present and future.

⁶³ See discussion in Hart, *Experience of God*, 142.

⁶⁴ See discussion in Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity. The 1992 Bampton Lectures* [The One, the Three] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 46.

⁶⁵ See for example, Eleonore Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* [God of the Bible] (The Aquinas Lecture, 2016) (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016). In setting up her syncretism, she sets out an excellent contrast between the interactivity of God with Jonah and demonstrates the seeming utter contrast with the Thomist explanation “calling it an apparent inconsistency” (Stump, *God of the Bible*, 19, see 11-19). The rest of the lecture seeks to rationalize this, what I would call, a real inconsistency.

⁶⁶ William F. Vallicella, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, s.v., “Divine Simplicity,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/divine-simplicity/>, accessed June 27, 2019.

⁶⁷ Hinlicky, *Simplicity*, 43. Using the Thomist analogy of equivocation method, consequent practitioners end up logically like a Carthusian Monk or Hindu hermit in absolute silence. See, Mullins, *Simply Impossible*.

⁶⁸ James Dolezal, ATIIG and GWP.

⁶⁹ Dolezal, ATIIG, 21.

⁷⁰ Dolezal, ATIIG, 20.

⁷¹ R T. Mullins summarizes how E. Stump and N. Kretzmann adopted a more biblical form of simplicity than the classic S-DDS: “In allowing extrinsic accidental properties to apply to God, Stump and Kretzmann have failed to see how truly radical the doctrine of divine simplicity is” (Mullins, *Simply Impossible*, 186).

⁷² Ryan T. Mullins, *Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity*, *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7, 2013:181-203. See also, Ryan T. Mullins, Review of *All that is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* by James E. Dolezal, *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 3, no. 2: 393-395, http://jbtsonline.org/review-of-all-that-is-in-god-evangelical-theology-and-the-challenge-of-classical-christian-theism-by-james-e-dolezal/?fbclid=IwAR2UYdFWhB5S2imFLiWayLkJ3cHuQAS38bDT_3nXF56ZGF83GEfSAEU2I, accessed 11/28/2028.

⁷³ Complex-simplicity of three persons, real potentiality and actuality, true temporality as sequentiality yet not bondage to cosmic physical time, and diverse internal properties all unified in an indissoluble, single Being. To this can be added both relational and constituent ontology.

⁷⁴ James Dolezal, ATIIG, 37).

⁷⁵ E.g., Plotinus writes: “Standing before all things, there must exist a Simplex, differing from all its sequel, self-gathered not inter-blended with the forms that rise from it, and yet able in some mode of its own to be present to those others: it must be authentically a unity, not merely something elaborated into unity and so in reality no more

than unity's counterfeit; it will debar all telling and knowing except that it may be described as transcending Being – for if there were nothing outside all alliance and compromise, nothing authentically one, there would be no Source. Untouched by multiplicity, it will be wholly self-sufficing, an absolute First, whereas any not-first demands its earlier, and any non-simplex needs the simplicities within itself as the very foundations of its composite existence.

There can be only one such being: if there were another, the two [as indiscernible] would resolve into one, for we are not dealing with two corporal entities.

Our One-First is not a body: a body is not simplex and, as a thing of process cannot be a First, the Source cannot be a thing of generation: only a principle outside of body, and utterly untouched by multiplicity, could be The First.

Any unity, then, later than The First must be no longer simplex; it can be no more than a unity in diversity” (Plotinus, How the Secondaries Rise from the First. And on the One (Ennead 5.4.1), *The Six Enneads*, trans. Stephen Mackenna and B. S. Page, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn450.htm>, accessed 12/30/18. [Fifth Ennead, Fourth Tractate, Section One]

⁷⁶Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Aquinas Lecture 44) (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980). Gunton, *The One, the Three*, 17-18, 24.

⁷⁷John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg NJ: P&R, 2013), 431. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. 1988. “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity [TOPT].” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23, no. 1 (April 1988): 37-53, see p. 45 on Augustine’s informing philosophy behind what C. Plantinga terms the “Augustinian/Neo-Platonic Trinity.”

N. Wolterstorff summarizes: “As I read the history of medieval philosophy and theology, the medieval were ineluctably gripped by the Plotinian vision of reality as requiring something that is the unconditioned condition of everything not identical with itself; this they identified with God. Says Plotinus: “If there were nothing outside all alliance and compromise, nothing authentically one, there would be no Source. Untouched by multiplicity [i.e., manyness, diversity], it will be wholly self-sufficing, an absolute First, whereas any not-first demands its earlier, and any non-simplex needs the simplicities within itself as the very foundations of its composite existence.” (Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” 108-109 [citing the Fifth Ennead IV, I stating in n. 17: “I use the version of the *Enneads* translated by Stephen MacKenna (Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1992)”].

I would assert that a logical concomitant of the syncretistic Neoplatonic and biblical views of God as developed by Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas is a veiled form of modalism and then also ultimately the impersonalism of the divine as well. Neoplatonic philosophy is very similar to classic Hindu Brahmanism. C. Plantinga seems to agree: “Augustine has biblical materials that lead him to talk as if Father, Son, and Spirit are the designations of distinct persons. He also has NeoPlatonic convictions that lead him to assert that they are, in effect, three names for the divine essence conceived of as self-related according to paternity, filiation, and procession. How these two convictions could be combined into a coherent view is remarkably hard to see” (C. Plantinga, TOPT, 46)

⁷⁸David Bentley Hart, *Experience of God*, 30.

⁷⁹For a survey of historical development, see, Katherine Rogers, “The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity [Divine Simplicity],” *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2: 165-186, see esp. 167-170; Gavin Orland, “Divine Simplicity in Historical Perspective: Resourcing a Contemporary Discussion,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014): 436-453; and Duby, *Simplicity*, 7-53.

⁸⁰Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1951), I:428-429.

⁸¹Mullins, *Simply Impossible*, 143. Mullins cites Peter Lombard, who in turn is building “upon several Christian theologians: Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers, Boethius, and Jerome” (*ibid.*, 144, nt. 10)

⁸²Katherin Rogers, “The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity,” 166. If there is no true diversity, then logically there can be no true diversity of persons – the Father is not the Son, the Spirit is not the Father and so forth, something, nevertheless, which all orthodox theologians attempt to preserve.

⁸³Rogers, *Divine Simplicity*.

⁸⁴Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God [De civitate Dei]*, trans. and intro. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), XI, 10 [318-319]. If there is personal diversity, could there not also be true property diversity?

⁸⁵Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 86-87.

⁸⁶Katherin Rogers *The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity*, *Religious Studies* 32, pp. 165-186. 1996 [Cambridge University Press].

⁸⁷For an excellent discussion of this see, e.g., Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity. The 1992 Bampton Lectures [The One, the Three]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 46.

⁸⁸Discussing how Eleanor Stump and Norman Kretzmann have adopted a more biblical syncretism of DDS than the classic S-DDS, R T. Mullins states: “In allowing extrinsic accidental properties to apply to God, Stump and

Kretzmann have failed to see how truly radical the doctrine of divine simplicity is” (Mullins, *Simply Impossible*, 186).

⁸⁹Herman Dooyeweerd discusses this extensively and his disciple, Albert Wolters develops biblically. See the most accessible of Dooyeweerd’s works: Herman Dooyeweerd, *The Roots of Western Culture*, eds. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1979). See also Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed., postscript Michael Goheen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

For a concise introduction to dualism, see, P. Andrew Sandlin, “Dualism: The ‘Christian’ Enemy of Christian Culture,” *Christian Culture: Center for Cultural Leadership*, P. Andrew Sandlin Blog, October 11, 2015, <https://docsandlin.com/2015/10/11/dualism-christian-enemy-of-christian-culture/>, accessed June 28, 2019. One of the best discussions I have seen of the distinction between the Hebrew prophetic vision and that of Greek Platonic dualism from the original sources in the Scripture and Plato, see George Eldon Ladd, “The Background of the Pattern: Hebrew or Greek,” in *Pattern*, 9-40.

⁹⁰ Cornelius A. Van Til, *Defense*, 42-43.

⁹¹ See discussion in Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three*, 7.

⁹² See Kreitzer, *Philosophy*.

⁹³ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2d ed. (London/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923/1958). For a good overview see, e.g., Bernard E. Meland, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 2, 2019 ed., s.v., “Rudolf Otto,” accessed June 28, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudolf-Otto#ref226756>.

⁹⁴ Hart, *Experience of God*. See, e.g., 1) Gavin Ortlund, *Divine Simplicity in Historical Perspective: Resourcing a Contemporary Discussion*, *International Journal for Systematic Theology* 16 (2014): 436-453; and 2) Pui Him Ip, *Re-imagining divine simplicity in Trinitarian theology*, *Academia* 2016, http://www.academia.edu/26303098/Re-imagining_divine_simplicity_in_Trinitarian_theology, accessed 12/4/2018.

⁹⁵ Dolezal, *ATIIG*, 7.

⁹⁶ A Trinitarian Christian epistemology within a biblical worldview, I contend, must include the complete triad of the tests of truth: Rational coherence to God’s internal and creational system of truth as revealed in Scripture, correspondence to the actual states of affairs in the perceived universe, and pragmatic functioning when implemented (see, e.g., David Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 327 [chapter 11]).

⁹⁷ See John S. Feinberg’s discussion on process theology and the God-temporality issue in Feinberg, *NOLH*, 433-436. See, John Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) and John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). For proponents, see, Pinnock, Clark, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994).

⁹⁸ I say “almost monist” because all the church fathers taught creation ex nihilo not an eternal universe.

⁹⁹ Hence, I do not agree *in toto* with Colin Gunton’s analysis because, for example, I reject the DeRegnon thesis that the West and East had different foundational axioms concerning the starting point for Trinitarian reflection. Gunton claimed that only the Latin Church prioritized the One over the Many but the Greeks started their reflection on the Three. Michel René Barnes, Lewis Ayres, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and others corrected this misunderstanding by clearly debunking the thesis that the Greek and Latin Church were divided. They demonstrate that both East and West were actually unified on similar forms of the simplicity presupposition. What I suggest also does not deny the many excellent biblical insights these Eastern and Western Fathers possessed as they struggled with theological problems within their varying amounts of syncretism. However, none of his critics, in my opinion, have refuted Gunton’s *basic* thesis that Augustine did indeed prioritize the One over the Many, though perhaps Augustine seems contradictory in his various analogies, some leaning toward unity theory others toward a social-community theory. In summary, if the catholic-orthodox consensus was simplicity, then both wings prioritized the One.

See, e.g., 1) Colin Gunton, *Augustine*, “The Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1990): 33-582; 2) Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity. The 1992 Bampton Lectures [The One, the Three]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Then note 3) Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Michel R. Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51-79). See also 4) Bradley G. Green, *Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine: The Theology of Colin Gunton in the Light of Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). 5) For an excellent correction of Gunton’s interpretation of counterposing the East and West: Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of*

Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity (Oxford Early Christian Studies) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Here clearly the language is metaphorical because our Father is spirit. Of course, spirit does not have corporeal wings, hands, eyes, ears, a wife, or a physical son. These are word pictures that we all understand.

¹⁰¹ Latin Vulgate is a faithful deduction of biblical doctrine (1 Jn 5:7-8).

¹⁰² Ladd, *Pattern*, 17, italics added.

¹⁰³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, "The Greek Menace," *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 122-123.