

God Is Not Simple: Toward a Proper Theology of the Trinity - Restoring the Doctrine of Father-God from Contextualization Gone Awry 2

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Abstract

The ancient Scripture-based consensus that the one true God, the Father, is triune in his being is correct without a doubt. However, the classic package that explained the doctrine is a syncretism of neoplatonic and biblical insight. It needs to be reformulated by a global multi-ethnic hermeneutical community. This reformation ought to be based upon a metaphysic not derived from Scripture-autonomous speculation but derived from careful biblical exegesis and logical deduction, checked within this community. To demonstrate this, I discuss the four concepts and alleged Scripture passages proving the simplicity doctrine.

Key Words: Trinity, Syncretism, C. A. Van Til, Simplicity Doctrine, Scripture-proofs.

Introduction

We pray, thank, and give praise not to a generic divinity, discussed under a theological locus of “Theology Proper,” but to the living God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., Jn 17:3; 1 Cor 1:4; 1 Thes 1:2-3; Php 1:3-4; Eph 1:16-17).¹ Paul is straight-to-the-point: “In *Father-God’s* wisdom, the *idolatrous* world through its *own* wisdom did not come to know him” (1 Cor 1:21a NASB).² The Reformation rediscovered the priority of Scripture. Only its narratives and propositions, along with the logical deductions derived from it, are able to outline the character and attributes of Father-God for his family (WCF 1.7). Only Scripture’s authority is primary and sufficient to give an inerrant framework within which answers can be discovered to all we need to know about coming into relationship with our Father. “Oh, that we might know the LORD! Let us press on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring” (Hos 6:3 NLT).

Consequently, the sufficient Scripture teaches that our Father with his Word and Spirit *does indeed* necessarily exist because the Godhead possesses among other essential attributes, aseity. He inescapably exists with no dependence upon anything outside the mutual and eternal interdependency of the three persons. Scripture teaches that the Godhead creates *ex nihilo* and that the Tri-unity existed without creation and before creation (Is 66:1-2; Heb 11:3). Furthermore, by him everything else has come into being and is upheld through the same means of the Word and Spirit (e.g., Acts 17:25; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:1-3; Jn 1:1-4). To understand these things we need the Spirit of Christ speaking through Scripture *alone* and solid logical deduction from it (WCF 1:6-10) not Thomist or any other antithetical metaphysic. I will term this biblical

¹ It is *not* sin to pray directly to Jesus (e.g., Jn 14:14; 2 Cor 12:8; see Acts 1:24, 7:59-60, 13:2) or the Spirit. Yet the usual teaching of Scripture is for us to ask Father-God through Christ’s name-merit by the Spirit: “Ask the Father in my name” (Jn 15:16, Mt 6:9; see also, e.g., Jn 14:16, 16:23, 26).

² Based on the NASB with my interpolations (see Lk 12:30 ESV; 1 Jn 2:16-17; 1 Thes 4:5). All Scripture references are from the New International Version, 1984 ed., except where noted.

view a “neo-classical” (NC) perspective following others. Its outline will become evident as we proceed.³

I suggest, furthermore, that someone completely outside of the Greco-Roman philosophical milieu such as a biblically well-read Druze, Navajo, Zulu or Miao believer would not have described Father-God in the terms of the classical view, which I term the strict doctrine of divine simplicity (S-DDS).⁴ I suggest that this is an extra-biblical teaching that produces a brilliant-dazzling paradigm that blinds its adherents to other more logically and biblically consistent models, similar to how consensual scientific paradigms often blind adherents to anomalous and falsifying data as Thomas Kuhn describes.⁵ In medicine, this is termed the Semelweis Effect: A “metaphor for the reflex-like tendency to reject new evidence or new knowledge because it contradicts established norms, beliefs or paradigms.”⁶ Certainly, we ought to respect and read the doctors of the faith that came before us, including the creeds they produced. Yet also, we need to remember that they have been wrong before. As the *Belgic Confession*, Article 7 states: “Therefore we must not consider human writings . . . equal to the divine writings; nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of time or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God, for truth is above everything else.”

Thesis Stated

According to sound deduction, our Father’s Being is *not simple* but is triune in the sense that he possesses within his single being both true unity and real diversity *at the same time*. The propositions “God is a trinity” and “God is simple” are logical contraries. Both propositions concerning the Godhead could be false, but both cannot be true.

One cannot logically and consistently hold both doctrines though, of course, throughout history both have been held together in an unstable mixture. This mix is what missional theologians call “syncretism,” attempting to merge two totally incompatible beliefs in a culture’s worldview core. I have limited the scope of this article to the topic of whether or not “simplicity” is proper biblical and describes our Father in concepts and terms derived from Scripture. This, of course, does not mean that we cannot use words such as “Trinity,” “hypostatic union,” and so forth but that each summative term must solely encompass biblical meaning coming from the “wisdom above” (*sola Scriptura* principle). Furthermore, I will inevitably also touch on divine

³ Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher, eds., *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities* (New York: Springer, 2013). I discovered this source from R. T. Mullins: “Both views claim that God is a necessarily existent being who has essential attributes like [the classical view] . . . Both views affirm the doctrine of creation ex nihilo and the entailment that that there is a state of affairs where God exists without creation Yet they disagree over four divine attributes [atemporality, immutability, simplicity and impossibility]” (Ryan T. Mullins, Impassibility, Passibility, and Divine Eternality: Story Edition—None of the Nuance, but All the Fun, (Personal and Non-Personal Conception of God [track], Innsbruck Analytic Theology Conference 8 August 2018).

⁴ For an excellent concise summary, see William F. Vallicella, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2018 ed., s.v. Divine Simplicity [Simplicity] accessed December 10, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/divine-simplicity/>.

⁵ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*. 4th ed. With an Introduction by Ian Hacking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

⁶ Michael Zachary Korzen, #43 [no title], *The Ohio State University National Disease Prevention Initiative Blog*, 26 November 2016, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://u.osu.edu/korzen.1/2016/11/26/the-semmelweis-reflex-or-semmelweis-effect-is-a-metaphor-for-the-reflex-like-tendency-to-reject-new-evidence-or-new-knowledge-because-it-contradicts-established-norms-beliefs-or-paradigms/>

atemporality, absolute divine immutability, and absolute impassibility as those attributes that intersect with and flow inexorably out of the strict doctrine of divine simplicity (S-DDS) as Thomas Aquinas demonstrated in the first section of the *Summa Theologica*.⁷ However, Scripture, I believe, rejects the classical syncretistic perspective on simplicity and the other three divine attributes and is much more akin to what some term the neo-classical perspective mentioned above.

To establish the thesis, I desire to establish of primary importance that the four core Scripture passages often used to prove the classic simplicity doctrine do not in fact do so. In addition, those who thus use these four passages to prove the simplicity doctrine actually use a logical fallacy of what is colloquially termed “begging the question” – or technically, *petitio principii*. In other words, S-DDS adherents first *presuppose* the simplicity doctrine based on apophatic natural theology and then read it back into the biblical text. As a form of circular reasoning, the process empties the doctrine of true biblical support, especially those passages often used in this process: 1) Deuteronomy 6:4 – God is one; 2) John 4:24 – God is Spirit; 3) Exodus 3:14 (Rev 1:4) – God is static Being; 4) 1 John 1:4 5, 4:16, et al. – God just is his qualities (e.g., light, love, etc.).

The S-DDS, in other words, is not “theology proper.” Richard Bauckham agrees: “The God who requires what the God of Israel requires cannot be merely the philosophical abstraction to which the intellectual currents of the contemporary Greek thought aspired.”⁸ Only when we as a multi-cultural Body of Christ-followers – ancient and modern – re-examine God’s word together, can “iron sharpen iron” (Prv 27:17), resulting in a proper theology of Father-God or “Patrology” as moderate Lutheran theologian, Robert Jenson, terms the first locus of the Apostolic Creed.⁹

Foundational Definitions and Preview

Eleanor Stump in *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* attempts to resolve the real contradiction between the Scripture and simplicity doctrine by calling it an “apparent inconsistency.” She shows that the most stringent forms of the S-DDS and even lesser consequent versions of the doctrine all portray divine-human interaction and interactive attributes within the Godhead as mere anthropopathic and anthropomorphic accommodations. Hence, the biblical description of these interactions cannot actually be an accurate description of the real state of affairs within the simple divinity discovered outside of Scripture. Interestingly enough, however, she demonstrates that even Thomas Aquinas himself, when he is in pastoral mode, demonstrates “a certain kind of humanity about God, too” by which she means interpersonal interactivity. However, when she elucidates the biblical accounts of interaction between Father-God and humanity through the story of Jonah and between the Father, his incarnate Son, and humanity through Aquinas’ commentary on John’s Gospel, she explains them

⁷ For an online version, see Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, accessed July 18, 2019, http://www.documenta-catholica.eu/d_1225-1274-%20Thomas%20Aquinas%20-%20Summa%20Theologiae%20-%20Prima%20Pars%20-%20EN.pdf.

⁸ Richard Bauckham, “God Crucified,” in *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament Christology of Divine Identity* [Jesus and the God of Israel] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 6.

⁹ Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 115. Hence, Patrology should not be the term for the study of the Fathers of the faith.

as merely analogies (“anthropomorphism”).¹⁰ In other words, to state it frankly, the tradition knows better than the clear revelation of the Scripture. Hence, all analogies comparing something in this creation to the Creator become actually equivocal – analogies of equivocation.¹¹

In addition, the S-DDS teaches instead that both the revealed description of true diversity within the divine self are only adaptive revelations of what only appears to be interactive change and true diversity. According to the tradition this diversity is actually non-existent, but only a mental construct as evangelical philosophical theologian Ryan T. Mullins demonstrates in “Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity.”¹²

Foundational Definitions

For clarity, I will begin with foundational definitions. The strictest form of the doctrine of divine simplicity (S-DDS) portrays the singular divinity apophatically through the *via negativa*. In this process, the divinity is portrayed as a perfect, singular and simple Being, because it is radically unlike anything found in this creation. In other words, to know divinity a person must meditatively *negativize* any sense data experienced in this world of composite and diverse things. As each sense perception comes into one’s mind, it must be negativized by thinking, “divinity is not [like] that.” As the process proceeds a person, according to the apophatic theory, eventually comes to experience divinity as a totally non-composite Oneness with no real diversity. Living, composite diversity, according to this doctrine, implies the possibility of death, and divinity cannot die or decompose into parts, such as a human body decomposes upon death. Divinity, hence, is the negative (“not like”) this universe of diversity.

Divinity, hence, must be oneness itself and cannot possess any complexity or possess any prior parts out of which the divinity is composed as if something was before the divinity existed. This implies, further, that only a single divinity exists. If there were more than one divinity, ultimate reality would be diverse. However, all diversity is part of this universe and divinity is “not this.” Divinity is also, then, without any intrinsic or extrinsic change, which itself is a form of diversity. As Ryan T. Mullins states, a simple divinity cannot exist “without timelessness and immutability”¹³ – and, I might add, strong impassibility. Divinity is outside of time and utterly without change whatsoever. Since time include parts, past present and future, and sequence, that is changing from the future to the present onto the past, a simple divinity is the negative of this type of diversity.

Furthermore, the simple One of the S-DDS cannot change at all by having discursive (sequential and analytical) thought with potential for a new, changing, or different thoughts.

¹⁰ Eleonore Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* [God] (The Aquinas Lecture, 2016) (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 18.

¹¹ Any proposed “analogy collapses into equivocation.” See, Paul R. Hinlicky. *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* [Simplicity] (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 43.

¹² 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://jbtonline.org/review-of-all-that-is-in-god-evangelical-theology-and-the-challenge-of-classical-christian-theism-by-james-e-dolezal/?fbclid=IwAR2UYdFWWhB5S2imF_LlWayLkJ3cHuQAS38bDT_3nXF56ZGF83GEfSAEU2I (11/28/2028)

¹³ Mullins, *Simply Impossible*, 181.

Divinity must be the negative of potentiality, hence divinity is pure actuality (*actus purus*) with no possible change at all. This apophatic process is part and parcel of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern mysticisms.¹⁴ As we enter the thought world of the Neo-Platonic philosophy informing Augustine and Aquinas, only two aspects of reality exist, hence the term “dualism.” The first aspect is pure actuality (*actus purus*) of non-changing unity and spirit as opposed to the second aspect of pure ever-changing flux and diversity. Pure, spiritual simplicity exists in a state of non-change (static oneness) and static being (or pure non-sequential “action”) – a contradiction in terms.¹⁵ Pure physicality that exists in a state of constant flux and diversity is “pure potentiality” and becoming. Writing in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, C. Dubray summarizes by noting how *Actus Purus* expresses “the absolute perfection of God”:

In all finite beings we find actuality and potentiality, perfection and imperfection.... Material substance is a pure potentiality. Moreover, change necessarily supposes a potential element, for it is a transition from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality; and material things undergo manifold changes Angels ... [are like humans] contingent. Their actions are successive, and are distinct from the faculty of acting.... God, from whom potentiality is wholly excluded, ... therefore, is simply actuality and perfection, *Actus Purus*.¹⁶

As a consequence, the singular, spiritual divinity of the classic S-DDS consists of 1) no temporal aspects (atemporality), 2) no physical-spatial composite parts, 3) no intrinsic accidental properties nor actions extending through time – he is pure act all at once, and, hence, 4) no logical-metaphysical property aspects, parts, or properties at all. This whole package belongs to the Neo-platonic syncretism and includes, as James Dolezal writes,

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.¹⁷

¹⁴ See, Mark R. Kreitzer, Simplicity, Analogy, and the Trinity: Restoring the Doctrine of Father-God from Contextualization Gone Awry 1, in *Global Missiology* 4, no. 16 (July 2019), accessed July 20, 2019, <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/2265>.

¹⁵ This is a good example of the use of equivocation or the analogy of equivocation. “Action” in this world of diversity means change and becoming. But in reified Being it means the opposite.

¹⁶ C. Dubray, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v., “Actus Purus” (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), accessed November 20, 2018, [New Advent], <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01125b.htm>. Note that Steve Duby and James Dolezal build their whole argument in their recent books on this principle. 1) James E. Dolezal, GWP, 2) James Dolezal, ATIIG and 3) Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity* [Simplicity] (T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology) (London: T&T Clark, 2016) [revised form of his PhD thesis]. In the Abstract of the actual thesis, Duby writes: “He [God] is positively “actus purus” and really identical to with his own essence, existence, and attributes, each of which is identical with the whole being of the Triune God This study then addresses the three most pressing objections to divine simplicity: (1) that it denigrates God’s revelation of the many attributes in the economy; (2) that it eliminates God’s freedom in creating the world and acting in history; and (3) that it does not cohere with the doctrine of the Trinity (Steven J. Duby, “Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account” [Simplicity Thesis] (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2014), 1, accessed June 30, 2019, <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/5935>.

¹⁷ 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). The Scriptural narratives and

Dolezal summarizes: Simplicity “is formally articulated apophatically as God’s lack of parts and denies that he is physically, logically, or metaphysically composite.”¹⁸ The apophatic method is to start with what is experienced in the created world and simply to negate everything experienced: “Divinity is not that.”

Consequently, the single, simple divinity is not able to have any true diversity, parts or accidents at all.¹⁹ The divinity is what it simply is. Respected philosophical theologian Katherin Rogers agrees: “With God we do not hypothesize any unity underlying the diversity because there is no diversity.”²⁰ The term “simplex” is a good description as conservative Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper affirms.²¹ Ironically, Rogers’ explanation of the divinity attempts to describe the unspeakable in human terms and analogies that do not and indeed *cannot* really describe the ineffable according to the *via negativa* methodology.²² The clear implication is that no true diversity exists between the character and attribute properties because no distinctions can exist, especially between the divinity’s essence and its existence. The divinity is identical to its attributes to preserve the doctrine of aseity.²³ Last, the S-DDS divinity is similar to the Neo-Platonic Simplex,²⁴ though the tradition is substantially syncretized with Father-God of Scripture. In the West, the idea of a simple divinity came via Parmenides, perpetuated by

propositional statements found within it that portray YHWH as not strongly immutable (soft immutability), as able to feel with his creatures, and as omnitemporal are read through the lens of the simplicity doctrine and are termed merely metaphorical and anthropomorphic (Dolezal, *ATIIG*, 85-86). See Thomist scholar Stump, *God*, 20-35, for further discussion and substantiation.

¹⁸ James E. Dolezal, *GWP*, 31.

¹⁹ Mullins, *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)

²⁰ Katherin 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.

²¹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1951), I:428-429.

²² Rogers description is, again, a logical contradiction because no one is able to describe the ineffable. More on this, however, later on.

²³ Rogers, *Divine Simplicity*.

²⁴ For example, 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*, translated by 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].

“Plotinian neo-Platonic” thought and is similar to other Eastern wisdom traditions.²⁵ Both Hellenistic and Indic traditions agreed that the ultimate divinity is immortal, indissoluble, unchanging, and uniform.²⁶

God the Father in Biblical Narrative Antithetical to S-DDS

Proof Texts of Simplicity and Lack of Property Diversity

To demonstrate this thesis from the sacred text, I turn to four alleged Scripture proofs of the S-DDS (and various other less strict forms). They are: 1) God just is his qualities (e.g., light, love, etc.) (1 John 1:4 5, 4:16, et al); 2) God is one (Dt 6:4; et al); 3) God is Spirit (Jn 4:24); 4) God is an immutable-static atemporal One, a Simplex Being (Ex 3:14).²⁷ My presupposition is that only Scripture itself can properly falsify the claims of support for the S-DDS. My preliminary conclusion is that these passages do not support the DDS because often proponents use these four core Scripture proofs after first presupposing the simplicity doctrine and then reading it back into the biblical texts themselves.

God just is his qualities

Herman Bavinck, a S-DDS advocate, believes that “‘divine simplicity’ is ... plainly taught in Scripture, where God is called light, life, love, etc., but is also implied in the very idea of God and in the other attributes.” This is a grammatical argument, which claims the meaning of “is” stands for the “is” of identity, not the “is” of predication, describing the subject. Without this grammatical argument and the resulting doctrine, Bavinck and other advocates maintain that God’s “perfection, unity independence and immutability cannot be maintained.” “All his attributes,” Bavinck continues, “are *divine* attributes; hence, infinite: identical with his being.”²⁸ In other words, any biblical affirmations concerning God that are “abstract nouns” such as God is light, love, strength, and so forth “rather than the corresponding adjectives” necessarily imply

²⁵ Parmenides: Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Aquinas Lecture 44) (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980). Gunton, *The One, the Three*, 17-18.

Plotinian thought: John 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.” 3) Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” 108-109 4) C. Plantinga, TOPT, 4.24

Eastern traditions: David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* [Experience of God] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 30.

²⁶ For surveys of historical development: Katherine Rogers, “The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity [Divine Simplicity],” *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2: 165-186, see esp. 167-170; Gavin Ortlund, “Divine Simplicity in Historical Perspective: Resourcing a Contemporary Discussion,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014): 436-453; Duby, *Simplicity*, 7-53; Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Emerging Scholars) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 35-142.

²⁷ For a similar list, see, e.g., Barry D. Smith, *The Oneness and Simplicity of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 23. Steven J. Duby adds to a similar list, Jn 5:26 – “life in himself,” Jas 1:17 – “no shadow of turning,” Ps 145:3 – “his greatness is unsearchable,” and Genesis 1:1 – “in the beginning God created” (Duby, *Simplicity*, 91-178). However, applying each of these passages to the DDS is based on the logical fallacy of *petitio principii* because each can easily evidence a neo-classical perspective as well.

²⁸ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*. Students Reformed Theological Library [Doctrine], trans. William Hendriksen (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1951/1977), 170, emphasis added.

that light, love, strength, etc. *equal* God's essence (1 Jn 1:4-5, 4:16, et al.).²⁹ If they are equal to God's essence, then they are logically equal with one another.³⁰ In other words, Scripture teaches, according to S-DDS adherents, that God *just is* his qualities (e.g., light, love, etc.) without any differentiation among them. However, somehow, without any biblical or logical demonstration except perhaps appeal to ancient tradition, he concludes that "simplicity is not a metaphysical abstraction. There is a very real difference between it and the philosophical idea of 'absolute being, the One, simplicity,' substance, the Absolute, etc., by means of which Xenophanes, Plato, Philo, Plotinus, and later on Spinoza and Hegel designated God."³¹

Scripture and sound deductive logic invalidate this classic teaching of property simplicity.³² First, a strictly simple divinity without a great measure of syncretism with Scriptural description of Father-God does not and indeed cannot *really* interact with the creaturely world it somehow "created." This is a perennial question in Brahmanic, Neo-Platonic, and even in some forms of Buddhist thinking, which opt for a variation of the simplicity doctrine as D.B. Hart so candidly admits:

The definition I offer . . . is one that, allowing for a number of accidental variations, can be found in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Vedantic and Bhaktic Hinduism, Sikhism, various late antique paganism, and so forth (it even applies in many respects to various Mahayana formulations . . . or to certain aspects of the Tao).³³

Second, the S-DDS doctrine prioritizes the One in relation to the Many within the Divinity and within this sense-experienced universe. However, the creation bears unmistakable and irresistible testimony to a Three-One God who is true-unity-and-real-diversity within himself – I use the gendered term deliberately. Third, contrary to Scripture, the God-Being of the All-One-Spirit cannot ever be known through human faculties that reason from something in the creaturely revelation (e.g., Scripture and creation) back to Father's nature. The divine-Being of the S-DDS is not comprehensible through any real analogical comparison to anything in this created world, which reflects nothing of the person and being of our Father-Creator. The S-DDS divinity is wholly other, totally different, absolutely transcendent as pure undivided unity, and thus in no way analogous to anything in this creation, which consists of unity and diversity. This, of course, is again contrary to Scripture because the creature reflects the glory of the Creator (Ps 19; Rom 1:18-21) and is meaningless to human understanding. It must be intuited in silence as mystics for millennia have – illogically – taught.

Fourth, logically, if God is love and justice, and both love and justice are the same as God's essence, then love equals justice, making the cross void. Within the essential character of Father-God, love is truly distinct from justice as Yahweh's paradigmatic revelation to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7 reveals: "The LORD . . . the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding

²⁹ See also the YHWH compounds: Yahweh-Healer, Sanctifier, Rock, Lifted-Up-One, Judge, Law-maker, King, Shepherd, Righteousness, Present-There, One-Who-Sees-and-Provides, etc. There are also EL/ELHM constructs that need to be considered (e.g., "the God of truth" – Is 65:16).

³⁰ Barry D. Smith, *The Oneness and Simplicity of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 60.

³¹ Bavinck, *Doctrine*, 170.

³² See Paul R. Hinlicky. *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016). *Contra*, James E. Doleful. 2015. *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick.

³³ Hart, *Experiencing God*, 4.

in love and faithfulness . . . , ; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (my translation). Without this real diversity/multiplicity of character qualities within God, the Father, then, could never be both “just and the justifier of the who has faith in Jesus” – the incarnate Son (Rom 3:26, NASB). God would not need to send his Son but could forgive, like Allah of the Qur’an, by a simple fiat without the necessity of propitiation and expiation of Father-God’s justice and human transgression (Rom 3:23-26; 1 Jn 2:1-2).

Fifth, if all the abstract nouns following the “is” equal God’s essence, then logically they are all synonyms, destroying the real verbal distinctions God has revealed about himself. In addition, this would mean that the subject and predicate can be reversed so that “Love is God,” “Light is God,” “Strength is God,” etc., much like “cat is feline” can be reversed without any diminishing of meaning (“feline is cat”). Certainly, however, reversing the terms is clearly idolatrous. “Love,” “light,” and “strength” are *not* God. YHWH alone is God. Consequently, YHWH possesses these distinct qualities as inseparable aspects of his character. The simplest explanation, on the other hand, results in logically nonsensical communication.

The Scripture implies, on the other hand, that “you are light,” speaking of believers (“in the Lord”) (Eph 5:7) and “God is light” (1 Jn 1:5), speaking of God in himself, are truly metaphorical analogies (though certainly not with 100% one-to-one correspondence), contrary to what the S-DDS teaches. Both speak of character, the first of created and dependent gifts, the second of uncreated and *a se* (independent) character. As B.D. Smith adds, “identifying God with one of his attributes or properties is a literary device designed to express that God truly or supremely is characterized by the attribute or property named. It is inadvisable to place too much theological weight on this literary usage.”³⁴ In other words, the “is” in the statements “God is love” and so forth is the “is” of predication not of identity. This means that the abstract nouns in the predicate such as God is Shepherd, Rock, Fortress, love, justice, wisdom, light, and so forth describe “real diversity” within the divine life of our always-living, awesome Father.

Sixth, by sound deduction, the S-DDS means that the God-Being is exactly equal to (identical with) its attributes so that this divinity, for example, does not *possess* absolutely independent ever-existing-life [aseity], light, love, strength, and justice. Instead, it *is* absolutely-immutable/absolutely-independent-life/love/justice/strength and so forth all merged into an undivided holistic-unity. In other words, what the divinity possesses is what the God-Being *is*. What exists within the divinity is completely identical to the divinity’s unitary-being (the doctrine of property identity). In other words, love is justice is omniscience is aseity is mercy is omnipotence, and so forth because the absolutely unitary Being of the divinity is equal to his attributes.

Seventh, classic S-DDS syncretism invokes the mystics’ apophatic methodology through the so-called *via negativa*.³⁵ Paul R. Hinlicky in *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* is certainly correct concerning Thomas Aquinas (and others in the tradition): “For Thomas divine simplicity is . . . a cipher for apophatic transcendence.” In an unconscious contradiction, Aquinas attempts a kataphatic description of this transcendence as comparable to creaturely being but being syncretistic (my term) and “unstable” (Hinlicky’s term) the “analogy collapses into

³⁴ Smith, *Simplicity*, 2017, 60. See also his list of biblically orthodox theologians holding this type of Scriptural support (Zanchi, Gerhard, Quensted, Heidegger, Bavinck).

³⁵ See discussion in Hart, *Experiencing God*, 142.

equivocation.”³⁶ Why is this so? This universe is made up of objects possessing both real-unity-and-true-diversity at the same time and hence *at this univocal point* analogically reflects the immanent Tri-Unity within the single Being of the Father. 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.³⁷

James Dolezal, defending the classic S-DDS, agrees.³⁸ He seems to believe that any biblically described interaction between God and a creature reveals merely an illusive-appearance of interaction. “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.”³⁹ Citing Bavinck, he claims that Scripture is “anthropomorphic through and through,” seemingly denying any true revelation because everything must then be 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.”⁴⁰ By this, it seems clear, he means that the perfect divine Being does not and cannot *really* interact with any creature because God-Being’s modality is pure actuality without any potentiality. Any point by point interaction with the creature is *appearance* only and would imply that the God-Being has potentiality within its undivided Being and thus is not pure actuality.

Last, as previously seen, not all of the ancient and some modern propagators of the doctrine would claim that DDS must include the doctrine of property identity. However, their contention is illogical and destroys the classic doctrine because it adds real diversity to God. These thinkers attempt to give ever more credence to the actual statements and narrative portrayals of divine human interaction than do the S-DDS adherents. Both, however, attempt to syncretize two non-compatible doctrines.⁴¹

I conclude this section by noting that we can move forward in an international hermeneutical community. I believe this community would be on the right track to postulate that Father-God’s predicated attributes (e.g., light, love) are not equivalent to the singular divine being but are rather co-inhering in the Father so that all three persons coinhere and fully share the Father’s singular identity and attributes. Each truly diverse quality is a facet of the character of the Father, co-inhering with the other facets but are yet truly distinct from the other aspects.⁴²

³⁶ Hinlicky, *Simplicity*, 43.

³⁷ Here I reject the idea that God can be known by the Thomist “analogy” methodology. Actually, this is an analogy of equivocation and ends up logically like a totally-consequent Carthusian Monk or Hindu hermit in absolute silence. See e.g., Mullins, *Simply Impossible*.

³⁸ James Dolezal, ATIIG and GWP.

³⁹ Dolezal, ATIIG, 21.

⁴⁰ Dolezal, ATIIG, 20.

⁴¹ Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation*, 2009; Barrett, *Simplicity*, 2017.

⁴² It seems that Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas is perhaps moving in this direction: “The unity of God, the one God, and the ontological ‘principle’ or ‘cause’ of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the *hypostasis*, that is, the person of the Father. The one God is not the one substance but the Father” (John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1985), 40-41. I have italicized “cause” above because I do not believe this causal language is

God is One

A second alleged proof text for the S-DDS doctrine flows out of the universally acknowledged truth that Scripture everywhere affirms in the words of the Shema that “YHWH is one” (Dt 6:4, 32:39; Is 44:6, 8, 46:9, Mal 2:10; etc.; Mk 12:29-30; Rom 3:30; Gal 3:1; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 1:17, 2:5; Jas 2:19; etc.). Richard Bauckham is lucid in this regard. There are two uses of the Hebrew and Greek words translated “one.” In the Shema (Dt 6:4), the meaning is “a case of uniqueness: there is only one God, not many” but not non-composite or simple.

In Jewish literature of this period there is never any implication of the other meaning: God is unified rather than divided. *Jewish writers evidently were not concerned with that issue.* The idea that divine nature, by contrast with finite creature, is indivisible or noncomposite [simple] occupied the Greek philosophical tradition and became an issue for the fathers of the early church, but it is not apparent in the Jewish literature of this period, not even in Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish thinker who appropriates Greek philosophical ideas in many respects.⁴³

In the context, Bauckham is stating without using the term that the unity of the Father and Son within the unique divine identity is a “perichoretic unity” of mutual indwelling not a unity of simplicity. A chart Bauckham uses a couple of pages earlier makes the same case. The heading is “‘One’ + ‘In-One-Another’” and then he cites “the Father and I are one ([Jn 10:30] [in parallel with] the Father is in me and I am in the Father (10:38).” Last, he cites in full John 17:20-23, 26 that speaks of the mutual indwelling.⁴⁴ The Jews at that time clearly noticed “an allusion to the Shema here,” as Bauckham states, because of our Lord’s use of the word “one” in connection with God. They took up stones to execute Jesus because they thought it was blasphemous, “you, a mere man, claim to be God” (Jn 10:31-33, see 8:58, 5:18). In other words, Bauckham continues: “The Father and the Son are one in their communion with each other. Jesus is claiming that the unique deity of the God of Israel consists in the communion between Father and Son.” Certainly, this is an almost audacious claim: “To assert this kind of oneness, the oneness of personal community of God, is unprecedented in early Judaism.”⁴⁵ Yet, while there is real perichoretic unity, there is also communion together in real diversity, a model of what the body of Christ is (Jn 17:21, 23). Therefore, “the NT documents emphatically place Jesus [with his Father] on the divine side of the categorical distinction between Creator and creation.” This is what the growing consensus of NT scholarship, following Bauckham, calls “divine identity Christology.”⁴⁶ But that clearly differs from the classic simplist theory as we shall see.

helpful as Mullins writes: “If the Son and Spirit have a cause for their existence, they do not exist *a se*.” In other words, using causal language with an atemporal and simple divinity is using an analogy of equivocation and hence is meaningless. Atemporal causality to explain eternal generation cannot escape the charge of Arianism without escaping into mysticism (Ryan T. Mullins, “Divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism,” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 [May 2016]), 284.

⁴³ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* [Gospel of Glory] (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2015), 24, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 22.

⁴⁵ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 32-33.

⁴⁶ Richard Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Witness* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2014), xviii.

The doctrine of God's unity from the Shema also provides the source of Paul's teaching that only one way of justification exists for all peoples before an interactive Father in Christ for whom there is no impartiality. "YHWH our God" is "the one and only God of all reality, the one Creator and Lord of all."⁴⁷ For Paul, "since the God is one" (Rom 3:30, lit. trans.), the Father will justify both Jews and those from the idolatrous nations in exactly the same manner, through faith in the Son. The words of the Shema, "express exactly that combination of particularity and universalism that is characteristic of early Jewish monotheism," so Paul is not innovating.⁴⁸ Here Paul teaches that at least two truly distinct persons exist within the unique divine identity (YHWH is one) and that this unity of Father and Son is – with the Spirit – the one YHWH over the whole earth. This is an echo of Zechariah 14:9-19 which in turn is the "only echo of this part of the Shema' within the Hebrew Bible."⁴⁹ In this prophecy, all people-groups of the earth will become YHWH's peoples (see also Is 19:24-25): "All peoples will be YHWH's peoples, all will love YHWH as the Shema requires, all will therefore worship him..., and all will receive the paradigmatic divine blessing on those who love him." In other words, the Shema means, among other things, that the Father's electing of Israel was "paradigmatic" and God's people, the one new humanity in Christ, would eventually never be dissolved into an undifferentiated universalism" but that God's eschatological people would be like the union and communion of the Godhead as the Lord prayed in his High Priestly prayer.⁵⁰

Consequently, the biblical teaching based on the Shema, according to Paul and Zechariah, contains a strong centripetal and missional substrate, but *not* a Neoplatonic philosophical apologetic for simplicity. The oneness of YHWH, thus, ought not to be used to deduce that God is absolutely simple, unknowable, and ontologically Other as the simple One over against the Many (the creation). Such is found in Medieval scholars of the Abrahamic religions influenced by Hellenistic philosophy: Rabbinic Judaism (e.g., Maimonides), Philosophical Islam (e.g., Al-Ghazali, Ibn-Sina, Averroes) and simplist Christianity (Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas) but not Scripture.⁵¹ The ontology behind the Shema is that of true-unity-and-real-diversity found in the Father, whose unique divine identity is shared by the Son and the Spirit. This means, as Paul Hinlicky writes, that "the divine essence is the Father,"⁵² who reflects himself in a true analogy within the true unity and real diversities found in the creation, which reflects the glory of the

⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* [Jesus and the God of Israel] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 96.

⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 96.

⁴⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 96.

⁵⁰ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 97.

⁵¹ See e.g., David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) and David B. Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Ghazali: Distinguishing God from World." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 3 (2008): 270–87. doi:10.1017/S0036930608004031.

⁵² Innovative Lutheran theologian Paul Hinlicky writes in a similar context: "I would argue that there is no divine essence existing apart [as a generic divinity], transcendentally causing things in general, which may or may not be connected to its own real presence in the Son and blessing in the Spirit as the eternal Father. If that is so, the divine essence *is* the Father of the Son and breather of the Spirit" (Paul R. Hinlicky, *Quaternity or Patrology? Pro Ecclesia* 23 no. 1 (2014), 52. I agree except to note it is closer to the NT teaching that the Father, the divine essence, spoke (Logos is in him as fully divine), then through/in the Logos the Spirit (Pneuma as in the Father and the Son) executed the Father's Word.

Father's unified Name. Similarly in his High Priestly Prayer, our Lord prays that his unified yet diverse people would be one "like" he and his father are one (Jn 17).⁵³

Further, the biblical teaching on the unity of YHWH ought not be used to deduce the doctrine of property identity, which claims all divine attributes are actually one in the uni-diverse plentitude of his single-simple Being.⁵⁴ Historically, classic trinitarian teaching affirms that God is both *not* an absolute monad like Allah, yet also paradoxically (not contradictorily) affirm the S-DDS property identity assertion as well.⁵⁵ Should this not instead logically lead to a monadic, ultimately impersonal divinity? However, the teaching of an utterly monadic God and of an absolutely undivided divinity with complete property identity are equivalent, denying the Trinity, as Ryan Mullins notes: "A common claim amongst contemporary theologians is that Christians must choose either the doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of divine simplicity. Interestingly, Islamic thinkers in the Middle Ages argued in a similar fashion against the doctrine of the Trinity."⁵⁶

It seems clear, then, that Christian thinkers cannot merely add more and more biblical material to simplicity doctrine within an already unstable syncretism to make the DDS logically consistent and to attempt an answer the astute judgments of Islamic or Rabbinic-Jewish philosophers.⁵⁷ Once we actually understand how radical the doctrine of simplicity is, then we are able to begin to move past the recent proponents of classic S-DDS⁵⁸ and agree with "contemporary theologians" in seeking to revise the neoplatonic substrate of the doctrine of the Trinity. Among those who are willing to rethink the classic view, though not yet with consensus, are inerrantist evangelicals (e.g., John Feinberg, Moreland and Craig, Frame), two Dutch Reformed philosophers (Wolterstorff and A. Plantinga), moderate neo-orthodox (e.g., Jenson, Gunton, Pannenberg, Hinlicky) and some more liberal theologians (Moltmann). A new consensus should only be reached in a multi-ethnic hermeneutical community perhaps led by the international missionary community.

Again, I conclude, that the best alternative reading for the "is" in the phrase "God is one" is not the "is" of identity: God's essence is an absolute singularity with no diversity. Instead, it is the "is" of predication: Oneness describes God in some manner that the rest of the Scripture defines, as Richard Bauckham and others have shown.

God is Spirit

The third proof text that S-DDS proponents use is that "God is Spirit" (Jn 4:24). This is also used in a missional context that is alien to the Hellenistic dualism. Simplists believe that Spirit implies

⁵³ Our union with Christ in the Father is not a pantheistic union, hence the word "like." See discussion in Wesley Duewel, "Christian Unity: The Biblical Basis and Practical Outgrowth," in *New Horizons in World Mission: Evangelical and The Christian Mission in the 1980s* (Papers and Responses Prepared for the Consultation on Theology and Mission. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. School of World Mission and Evangelism, March 19-22), ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 265-286.

⁵⁴ See context of Dolezal, *Simplicity*, 77, 83.

⁵⁵ Notably recently by Steve Duby, *Simplicity*, 34-53.

⁵⁶ Mullins, *Simply Impossible*, 199.

⁵⁷ See extensive discussion of these issues in Dale Tuggy, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016 ed., s.v. Trinity, accessed July 21, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/>. An official reprint is Dale Tuggy, *Trinity* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu, 2013).

⁵⁸ E.g., in the Reformed arena are Paul Helm, Richard Muller, James Dolezal, and Steven Duby.

non-materiality, which must by definition be compound and made of decomposable parts. Since only materiality encompasses true diversity, ergo its opposite spirituality must encompass real, non-diverse unity. Therefore, God is a simple oneness in his pure spirituality. The major problem is that this presupposes the Hellenistic and later Gnostic dialectical dualism of matter-diversity over against spirit-unity. True unity and real diversity cannot exist at the same time within the same Being or even data points. Biblically, this is untenable, as we shall see more in a later article, because God is true-unity-and-real-diversity at the same time.

Both the OT and NT teach or imply that the one true, living and interactive God always IS/lives as everlasting unified-and-diverse Spirit. As “spirit” (Jn 4:24), Father-God is owed worship neither in a symbolic earthly palace-temple in Jerusalem nor any other physical place (see e.g., Is 66:1-3). Humans are to worship the Father in the Spirit and fulfillment truth but not now in a typological Temple.⁵⁹ “For through” Christ, Paul states in a Temple context, “we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph 2:18). Our Lord concludes the missional meaning in John 4: “The day shall come and now is” that any person in these last days can worship him anywhere in Father’s earth. God the Father is “spirit,” he states (Jn 4:24), so we must together (as a diverse unity) worship him. The near and broad context affirms a missional context while not even hinting at a simplist explanation (Jn 4:23, 17:20-23).

The OT also teaches that Father is indeed “spirit” and “not weak, mortal flesh” (see e.g., Is 31:3). The Hebrew prophetic worldview suggests the connotation that Father (in the Logos and Holy Spirit) is fully independent, ubiquitous Spirit-power with no weakness or limits at all such as found in dependent, human “flesh.” The Creator made humanity a creature that was not strong like God but weak and dependent as a creature with physical-spiritual dual nature. The powerful and personal Creator, possibly through the preincarnate Logos, breathed into him spirit-life through the divine Spirit (Gen 2:7). Now humans are an integrated whole a spirit-body substance duality – Gen 2:7). Also now all the unregenerate because of the fall are totally morally-rebellious in all aspects of their being (Rom 3:9-20, 8:5-7; Eph 2:1-3, et al). The life only returns when the Spirit returns to weak human spirit and body as reflected in John 20:22, when the Logos incarnate symbolically replays the creation scenario by blowing into the apostles his breath-spirit of life. Again there is no connotation at all of a simplist meaning of a non-compound Spirit.

Furthermore, the Father as invisible, pure spirit, dwelling in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16; Jn 1:18) “is the true God; . . . the living God and the everlasting King of all the nations” (Jer 10:6-10). As the only God he commands the nations to “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Is 45:22). The term “living God,” thus, is a term used many times in Scripture. For example, the communicating Father states similar words as these: “Therefore, as surely as I live, declares [YHWH] . . . of Hosts, the God of Israel, surely” – then he interactively speaks against Judah and the surrounding nations (Zep 2:9). When speaking with Zion, the Father speaks through Zephaniah: “The LORD your God is with

⁵⁹ This is worship that springs up in our human spirit indwelt with his Holy Spirit, flowing like “living water” into all of the earth (Jn 4:10-11, 7:37-39). Possibly these passages are a reference to the river of life in the garden of God (see Gen 2:11-14) that becomes a temple-city (Ps 46:4). Believers now in Christ are again renewed with the Spirit lost in the fall, hence are temples of God out of whom flows the rivers of life and the fruit of life for the healing of the nations (Eze 37:1-11; Rev 22:1-2). See Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).

you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing” (Zep 3:17). Or, “this is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites” (Jos 3:10). The inexorable implication of “living” is, therefore, that he can “speak,” “see,” “hear,” “feel,” and “move about” and respond – without physical eyes, ears, or feeling limbs, certainly. “He does whatever pleases him” (see Ps 115:2-8) in response to the affairs of humanity according to the constant narrative of Scripture. He is, after all, “spirit [and not flesh]” (Jn 4:24), yet he speaks – sometime audibly in the life of Israel at Sinai and in the life of Israel when the Word became incarnate. Still, no one has ever seen his form (Dt 4:15, 23, 25; Jn 1:18). When Israel heard Father-God’s voice without a form, Moses wrote: “For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of *the living God* speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived” (Dt 5:26)? This awesome Father-God, thus, is alive and a dynamic interactive Spirit-Person with no hint of him being aloof, simple, and without any diversity of interactive thought, potential action, and emotion.

I conclude that Scripture does not make a dualistic distinction between static Being and dynamic Becoming as is found in Hellenistic and other ancient philosophies. The living Father is both never changing in character and core attributes *and* interactive becoming without such change. John 4:24 certainly does not describe an atemporal or even the strongly immutable, simple divinity of the ancient philosophies unless simplicity is first presupposed and the narrative read through that single eyeglass. Paul summarizes the core missional message he proclaimed among the idolatrous peoples. He taught that they should “turn to God from [dead] idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thes 1:9). Consequently, no-thing or no Being exists that is more metaphysically ultimate than the “living,” invisible Father of Scripture. When one reads Scripture with the clear passages interpreting the less clear, then Father-God, who is ever-living Spirit, always has lived within true-unity-and-real-ever-living-tri-diversity-of-persons. These each have personal “space” yet paradoxically share the same, singular substance of the Father analogous to the how three dimensions share a singular infinite space.

Angelic spirits also all reflect their Creator’s true unity-and-real-diversity. They can discursively think, will, and communicate in the diversity realm – “words of men and angels,” which carry meaning in the so-called Platonic, metaphysical realm of non-diversity. Actually Plato was wrong. Spirits can parade before God’s throne and give suggestions as their Creator-King interacts with them (Job 1:6-12, 2:1-7; 2 Kgs 22:19-23). Actually, Scripture does not presuppose the ancient dualism between two dialectically opposed realms of a sense world of ever-change *and* a dialectically opposed metaphysical realm of non-change – a static and simple, singular Form in which a simple divinity is the essence. No orthodox Christ-follower has held the *pure* Platonic dualism, yet many have syncretized it with the biblical-orthodox doctrine of the Creator and the *ex nihilo* creation distinction.

God is immutable Being (not becoming)

The doctrine of the “living God” also falsifies a fourth alleged proof that God is simple-static being of pure unchanging act with no potential becoming/change.⁶⁰ This last proof text is based

⁶⁰ S. Duby’s PhD thesis is concerned that this is not an accurate portrayal of the simplicity doctrine’s approval of the *actus purus* hypothesis. “The divine essence [is] living, by which God is signified actively to live and to do all things by himself,” he says, citing Polanus. This somehow, he believes, is “puncturing the amorphous sentiment that older authors in western Christianity have somehow conceived of God as ‘static’” (Duby, *Simplicity Thesis*, 153).

on a presumed meaning of the Tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew consonants of the Name, YHWH (Ex 3:14-15). Ironically, the God of the S-DDS position verbally names himself *in interaction* with Moses as the “I AM.” S-DDS claim the reason for this name is he possesses all eternal existence within himself all at once because HE IS never-changing actuality, thus cannot actually interact. R. Kendall Soulen believes correctly that this translation of the Tetragrammaton by the word “being” (ὁ ὄν) was something to regret.

Famously, the LXX (followed by the Vulgate) renders YHWH’s solemn name-revelation to Moses in Ex. 3:14 with the phrase, Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὄν (*ego sum qui sum*). Thus the church fathers believed they had behind them the authority of the Bible, and indeed of God, when they identified the name YHWH with the concept being. Yet this verse alone cannot account for the astonishing depth and breadth of the conceptual transposition that took place. What is at stake rather is the systematic subordination of one whole realm of discourse to another, namely, that of Israel’s Scriptures to that of classical metaphysics.⁶¹

Soulen here cites Etienne Gilson, who states that the church fathers read “classical” – I would add neoplatonic – “metaphysics” into this passage and that led them to believe that “Exodus lays down the principle from which henceforth the whole of Christian philosophy will be suspended. From this moment it is understood once and for all that the proper name of God is Being and that ... this name denotes His very essence.”⁶² This certainly seems to me to be a good example of syncretism, resulting in submission to a very real cultural *Zeitgeist* that infects Christian reading of Scripture to this day.

I would reply that, first, the fathers certainly mistranslated this key passage. Second, they ignored or were blinded enough to overlook the intertextual evidence establishing its true meaning. Third, these other passages in the OT that explain the true diversity in YHWH’s name negate the concept that the divinity is essential a Simplex outside of time (atemporal) and that all the character qualities of the divinity equal its essence. Then, fourth, Scripture teaches instead that YHWH does not possess hard-immutability or timelessness, but instead is living-Being-and-Becoming-in-motion yet also is never-changing in his essential attributes. I will examine each of these four in order.

First, the meaning of the Name, as it is revealed throughout Scripture, when examined in varying context negates this imputed connotation. First of all, in this passage when YHWH spoke in the fire, the God-who-speaks and interacts states that his name is “I AM who/what I AM” or “I AM who I will be” [אהיה אשר אהיה]. Or simply “I AM/WILL BE” [אהיה]. YHWH then

However, first, his whole thesis is founded on a fatal logical error of *petitio principii*. He presupposes simplicity, then reads it into every proof text. “Pure act” and “simplicity” result in a totally incomprehensible divinity that no analogy can describe at all. If no metaphysical composite dynamism of thought, time strand, or emotion, and if no logical composition (e.g., no syllogism) are able to describe God ad intra and no internal change is at all allowed, how can this divinity be alive in any sense meaningful at all to humanity? After all pure dynamism is purely static and unchanging, single acting! Furthermore, the definition of life in the simple One and life in creatures are absolutely dialectically antithetical to one another as per the definition of the Creator-creature distinction in simplicity dogma. Yet the same biblical language is used of both, showing a true analogy with a univocal core demonstrating that a truly similar element exists between the two. Otherwise, the analogy between the two types of life is an analogy of equivocation.

⁶¹ R. Kendall Soulen, “YHWH The Triune God [YHWH],” *Modern Theology* 15, no. 1 (January 1999), 34.

⁶² Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (New York: Charles Scribner, 1936), 51, cited in Soulen, YHWH, 34.

adds concerning himself: “This is My name forever [עולם], and this is My memorial-name to all generations [לדר דר].”⁶³ Interestingly, the Angel’s reply was grammatically in the dynamic Hebrew qal imperfect. Wolfhart Pannenberg agrees that the phrase should be translated “I shall be who I shall be” which negates “Augustine’s argument,” an S-DDS proponent, “of its most important evidence.” This means that “there is future to God, then, and he will show himself to be what he will be. In other words, he is free and unrestricted in his actions. This is a far cry from the timeless identity of ‘I am who I am.’ Thus in his reference to Exodus 3:14 Augustine was mistaken.”⁶⁴

Consequently, the personal-covenantal name Moses heard should be rendered something like: “I am ever living [ever-existing]” or even “I have always been what/who I always will be.” YHWH’s interactive answer to Moses’ query at the bush, thus, gives us key insight into the meaning of his name: “Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” The Messenger-Angel of YHWH replied to Moses, “‘I AM/WILL BE WHO I AM/WILL BE’; . . . ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.’” (Ex 3:13-14, my trans.). In YHWH’s own mouth, the phrase meant something like “I am/will be” but in the mouths of his people “He is/will be.”⁶⁵

Second, interestingly enough, the Apostle John and the angel choruses in heaven provide intertextual (parallel) passages that seem to translate the Name as an ever-rolling present, flowing from the future through the present to the past: “Grace and peace to you from him who is [present], who was [past time], and who is to come [future]” (Rev 1:5, see 1:8, 4:8, 11:17). The Lord’s brother writes the Hebrew, dynamic imperfect in good Greek: “to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages [past], now [present] and forevermore [εις πάντας τούς αιώνας, unto all the ages – future]! Amen!” (Jude 25). The author of the Hebrews echoes this meaning also concerning Christ: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever [εις τούς αιώνας]” (Heb 13:8). In the only extant words of Moses outside of the Pentateuch, he explains the meaning of YHWH, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (Ps 90:2). Notice the triad of the tenses of time, again a reflection, it seems, of the Tri-unity in the life of the Father within the true-unity-and-real-diversity manifest in the creational time (CPT). YHWH does not mean what the simplist insists it denotes. He is not simple and atemporal. This is again a case of the logical fallacy of *petitio principii*, assuming that which is being proved.

In addition, third, when Moses asked YHWH to reveal his glory, the LORD proclaimed his Name in a time-space interactive manner, describing true character diversity within the real unity of the single Name (Ex 33:18-19, 34:5-8). In this paradigm-setting discourse, YHWH communicates his Glory-Name in a series of descriptions that explain two truly distinct character qualities that do not equal one another as the S-DSS theory postulates.

⁶³ Note the parallel between “עולם” and “לדר דר,” implying that God is revealing himself in time to humanity into perpetual generations in the future as the HE IS/I AM.

⁶⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God,” in *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson* [Eternity], ed. Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 64.

⁶⁵ Addressing this issue, Bruce Waltke writes: “God’s name is a sentence, and in his own mouth means ‘I AM,’ and in the mouth of Israel, ‘HE IS’” (Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* [OT Theology] [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007]), 11. See also, J. Carl Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* 158 (January-March 2001): 36-51, esp. 42.

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, YHWH. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

The first set of synonymous qualities express his ever-interactive love and mercy upon his creatures. The second set after “Yet,” expresses his justice and present/future judgment upon human rebellion. As Paul states unambiguously in Romans, these two absolutely distinct and non-synonymous characteristics in the single life of our Father-YHWH – grace and justice – can only be reconciled in the cross but not by removing their real distinctiveness. Thereby this propitiatory sacrifice provides the foundation for Paul’s apologetic of the cross in which “[Father] might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:23-27 NASB). Consequently, if the S-DDS is true, love and justice are equivalent and both equal to Father’s Being, then we know nothing about the redeeming Father-God based upon revealed human language and what God has accomplished for man and his salvation. Logically, God’s person and work in the S-DDS is essentially unknowable though discursive thought or analytical discourse unless a great measure of syncretic insight is welded onto the simplist viewpoint.

Sound deduction, then, shows that our Father ever-lives with life in himself, which reveals the glory of his grace and justice. “HE IS,” then, must be an ever-rolling-present provider of all his creatures needs (Ps 145:15-16). He is all we need. YHWH is our Shepherd, Banner of Victory, Righteousness, Peace, and so forth (Ps 23:1; Ex 17:15; Jer 23:6; Jdg 6:24). Psalm 144:1-2 is explicit in a more literal translation: “Blessed be YHWH, my Rock ..., my Loyal-and-Gracious One,⁶⁶ my Fortress, my High Tower, My Deliverer, my Shield, and the One in whom I take refuge” (see also Ps 18:1-2). Further, the past is forever gone and the future good that he has planned for us his people is not yet. That plan exists only in Father-God’s mind, “who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:11). Consequently, HE IS “always-living” through “ever-present time,” implies further that the Father (inseparably together with the Son and Spirit) is living within sequence, an ever-dynamic, rolling, moment after moment present. This implies interrelation after interrelation, thought after thought, provision after provision, pure passion after pure passion. Each motion or change in thoughts and emotions, *never* changes his essential divinity that is his non-communicable attributes. Father is continually working out all things in a view of time philosophically termed “presentism.”⁶⁷ He is not frozen outside of cosmic metaphysical time in a totally Other state of “non-time” or even an ever-static, frozen present time in which everything is present to him. It is a contradiction to state

⁶⁶ יְהוָה (“He is my loving God” in NIV; “My Lovingkindness” in the NASB).

⁶⁷ Thomas Crisp gives the basic meaning: “PRESENTISM, roughly, is the thesis that only the present is real. The opposite view is *eternalism* or *four-dimensionalism*, the thesis that reality consists of past, present and future entities [all existing together].” A bit later, he summarizes: “Simply put, it’s the thesis that everything is present,” with the implication that this definition includes the Creator as well. See Thomas M. Crisp, “Presentism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, ed. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 211-212, emphasis in original.

that the divinity is both atemporal and in ever-present time as do many S-DDS proponents.⁶⁸ Father-God is either outside of time altogether (atemporal) or in the flowing-present of DMT mirrored in the CPT. The two cannot logically be syncretized.

Since this is true, the clear words of Scripture teach this view of presentism if read without the filter of the S-DDS: “Therefore,” our Lord states, “do not worry about tomorrow” as it has not yet come. “For tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Mt 6:14 NIV). Our “heavenly Father” feeds and clothes his creatures “at the proper time,” and thus he “knows you need them” as well. He will keep giving in present time and in personal interaction all we need, when we “look to him” and “seek first his just reign on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:26, 30, 32-33 see 6:10; Ps 145:15-16, 6:33). Contrary to some, therefore, the passages revealing the Father’s Name as YHWH is not a straightforward proof of S-DDS and its concomitants, atemporal and hard immutability.

In addition, fourth, according to Scriptural evidence, YHWH (Father-God, Word, and Spirit) is a living-Being/Becoming-in-motion. Again Pannenberg is spot on. I agree with him at this juncture (though not in several others). While discussing Augustine’s view on Psalm 102:24-27, he writes that God lives forever and remains the same while “everything else passes away (Ps. 102:27).” God’s identity thus remains unchanged “‘from everlasting to everlasting’ (Ps. 90:2). This need not import timelessness, however,” he continues, “only faithfulness through the changes of time and history, faithfulness in identity with himself and therefore in relation to his creatures, too.”⁶⁹ Certainly, his merciful and just character can never change as he can never stop being merciful, nor lie nor cease to do that which is good, just, and holy (Mal 3:1-7; Num 23:19; Jas 1:17).

In this sense, according to Scripture, he is unchanging. On the other hand, Father-God can “become” in another sense, because his thoughts and emotions toward us *do* change, if we read Scripture without the syncretism of the S-DDS monocle.⁷⁰ Because the creation reflects and reveals Father-God, it exists also in the ever-dynamic present upheld by the HE IS/WILL BE. Certainly, the creation, as absolutely dependent being, had a beginning, while the independent, *a se* Father always lives as the self-existent, ever-living God (Acts 17:25) with no beginning of his life and no end of it as well. He alone is the original Being with and upheld by his Word/Son and their mutual Spirit (Dt 32:39; Is 43:1, 13, 45:21-22). “‘Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the LORD” (Is 66:2). Surely also in an analogous and contingent manner (ectype), each dependent created being reflects the independent Being of our Father (archetype). However, an analogy (ectype) to be valid must have one or more points of exact agreement with the archetype in order to reflect the original but never a comprehensive agreement on all points otherwise it would not be an analogy. Any other type of analogy is the false analogy of equivocation.⁷¹

⁶⁸ 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 English* 4/13 (2016) <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1911>.

⁶⁹ Pannenberg, *Eternity*, 64.

⁷⁰ See chapters 6-7 in John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God [NOLH]* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

⁷¹ See Kreitzer, *Simplicity, Analogy*.

Consequently, for each new moment of the dependent and reflecting creation, the past is forever gone exactly like what occurs within the independent and self-sufficient Being of Father-God. God knows the future comprehensively because he has foreordained all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph 1:9-11). God then is not above and beyond any and all time-strands, as the S-DDS perspective teaches.⁷² Instead, he possesses a time strand in himself, as N. Wolterstorff correctly claims.⁷³ Hence, he is not able to move into and out of the universe's past and future which is there "before" him as the S-DDS eternalist perspective implies.⁷⁴

Hence, biblically, for Father-God the past always comprehensively exists ONLY in his memory and only partially in creatures' memories. The future of the whole creation/universe and God's coming perfected kingdom does not yet exist except in Father-God's foreknowing, fore-planning and interactive mind. It will come to pass in times and seasons "set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7; see Eph 1:11) including "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, *which God will bring about in his own time*—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:14-16, emphasis added; see also Mt 24:36). The Father is thus providentially re-generating (renewing and upholding – Heb 1:3; Col 1:21) the next trillionth of second in three-dimensional, ever-present rolling reality (sort of a divine hologram) according to the counsel of his foreordained plan. He does this out of his mind "through/by" the everlasting Word-Wisdom and energized "by" the everlasting Spirit (see e.g., Eph 1:11; Acts 2:23, 4:28; Jn 1:2-3; Heb 1:2, 9:14; Col 1:16). Our Father, as the "I AM," began the CPT all at one time, each moment of the whole universe is the same time (contrary to theories of relativity), and the totality of the universe ends precisely at the same time that is generated from the creative mind of the Triune God.⁷⁵ It seems best then to believe that Father-God lives both with internal mental succession and external successive actions. In other words, he is not simple without temporal properties.

In the context of Exodus 3 and especially in 3:33-34, יהוה (YHWH), therefore, is the personal and interactive Name of our Father-God (in the Son with the Spirit), who desires to dwell with his earthly covenant family, his sons and daughters (see Jer 3:19 and Is 43:6; 2 Cor 6:18). He hears their cries for help, and he "comes down" from his divine metaphysical time (DMT) into created physical time (CPT) and space to help them at various times and places (see e.g., Ps 18:3-19; 144:5; Is 64:1).⁷⁶ His help comes always with powerful and very personal interactive action that had not yet been revealed (see e.g., Ex 3:7-8). Ultimately, he sends his own Word to become flesh to redeem his sheep: "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but to do the will of him [my Father] who sent me," our Lord states (Jn 6:38; see Jn 1:14; Gal 4:4-5;

⁷² Strangely, the S-DDS uses a spatial metaphor in this, which cannot actually exist within its non-spatial, non-temporal perspective. Here, the S-DDS builds upon a *meaningless analogy of equivocation*.

⁷³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God everlasting," in *Inquiring about God: Volume 1, Selected Essays* (ed. Terence Cuneo; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133-156. "Indeed, so basic to the biblical writings is their speaking of God as agent within history that if one viewed as only an impassive factor in reality, or as one whose agency does not occur within human history one would have to regard the biblical speech about God as at best one long sequence of metaphors pointing to a reality for which they are singularly inept, and as at worst one long sequence of falsehoods" (Wolterstorff, *God everlasting*, 133).

⁷⁴ See note 65.

⁷⁵ If true, this certainly falsifies theories of personal-perspectival, time-space relativity.

⁷⁶ CPT = Created Physical Time; DMT = Divine Metaphysical Time (see Garrett DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Series) [GNT] (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). See my discussion in Kreitzer, *Rescuing*.

Php 2:6-8; Col 2:9; 1 Tim 2:5, 3:16; Heb 2:14). Oliver Crisp states the contradiction between the neoplatonic Simplex and an incarnation succinctly.⁷⁷ How can “the timeless Word of God” assume “a temporal human nature,” which seems clearly impossible: If a simple divinity “is timelessly eternal, then there can be no time at which the Word of God can be said to do or become anything.”⁷⁸ The gnostic Docetics were certainly intuitively correct about the impossibility of a simple, atemporal divinity becoming incarnate. The classic doctrine must syncretize neoplatonic and biblical material, then call the incarnation a seeming paradox and a mystery.

Our Father, on the other hand, always reveals himself most fully to his people in covenant inter-relationships. Without a filtering logarithm, such as Google uses to hide unwanted search results, and without the *a priori* syncretism belonging to the S-DDS, the text of Exodus 3 inexorably implies that Father-God has temporal, interactive properties. An absolute One cannot add the multiplicity of temporality such as the incarnation entails without ceasing to be simple.

Therefore, the Name implies that Father-God’s life dwells in an always-existing, present interactivity. The Tetragrammaton, consequently, does not imply a simple-static One nor even an ever-active Pure Act. This understanding of the Name fits much better within a perspective of a complex-unity together with an omnitemporalist,⁷⁹ ever-rolling-presentist position. He is the everlasting, interactive God, whose character and essential attributes never change not an atemporal-eternal static Simplex.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the Name is often paralleled by the biblical term “the living God” found in both Testaments.⁸⁰ Scripture describes the Father as “He is the One who always is, has always been, and will always be” (Rev 1:8, 4:8; see Heb 13:8 for Christ), possessing the only divine Being (Is 43:10, 45:14). Comparing First Timothy 1:17 (“immortal, invisible, the only God”) and 3:15 (“church of the living God”) also brings up a further implication. God is the undying “immortal” King (see also Rom 1:23), the “living God.” The connected concepts of the “immortal” and the “living,” further suggest that God is not one frozen in one-thought-without-sequence. He is “an-alive-God” in contrast to the “dead gods” of the idolatrous nations, whose gods cannot observe, listen to and answer prayer, act, or move in response to danger of those he/she/it loves (Pss 115:4-8, 135:15-17). Instead, these two biblical ideas fit better with a God, who ever-abides in an always-enduring life (see e.g., Dan 6:20) of interrelationship within the oneness-and-threeness of the Godhead and, in most of the contexts,

⁷⁷ See the Apostle John’s refutation in 1 Jn 1:1-4, 4:1-8. See 1) Richard A. Holland, Jr., *God, Time, and the Incarnation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012). 2) Ryan T. Mullins, “In Search of a Timeless God” (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2013), accessed July 19, 2019), <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/3736>. See chapter 7, “The Incarnation of the Timeless God,” 170-213. 3).

⁷⁸ Oliver Crisp, “Incarnation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168. The classic doctrine is not actually Nestorian because two persons do not dwell in the single person, but seems to be semi-Nestorian because an atemporal Son and a temporal Son somehow exist within only one theanthropic person, who is both fully divine and fully human.

⁷⁹ See DeWeese, GNT. Yahweh has a time strand within himself (DMT – divine metaphysical time) that exists as sequentiality without a physical metric as occurs within the time system he created in the universe with its time metric in the sun and stars (CPT).

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Dt 5:26; Jos. 3:10; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; 2 Kng 19:4, 16; Ps 42:2; 84:2; Isa 37:4, 17; Jer 10:10 [the living God and everlasting King]; 23:36; Dan 6:20, 26 [the living God and enduring forever]; Hos 1:10; Matt 16:16; 26:63; Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26; 2 Cor 3:3; 6:16; 1 Tim 3:15; 4:10; Heb 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; Rev 7:2).

in temporal interaction with humanity. Joshua 3:10, for example, unambiguously expresses this interactive connotation: “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite” (NASB).

In other similar OT passages such as Jeremiah 10:10,⁸¹ the prophet is unambiguously teaching that YHWH “is the true ... living God and the everlasting King.” Further evidence of this temporalized, interactive implication of the Tetragrammaton is the LORD’s self-testimony spoken through the prophet Moses: “as I live forever,” he swears by interacting with himself (Dt 32:40; Heb 6:13).⁸² Of course, “as I live forever” could imply an atemporal Being if we tear this one phrase out of the context of what we have discovered in the whole of the Bible. Only by means of an extra-biblical presupposition imposed upon the text, then, could we claim that the phrase “living forever” implies a totally alien-to-us type of life.⁸³

Yet another, last implication of this living Name is that Father-God in himself is sufficient for everything, including all his creatures’ needs,⁸⁴ because he has “life within himself” (Jn 5:26). The doctrine of aseity, thus, is not a logical concomitant of an abstract principle of simplicity as the tradition claims. Instead, aseity flows out of a dynamic, living Being of the Father, who alone is always-living-and-giving life. He thus gives life dependently to all of human (and angelic) beings, but ever-always interactively with and to the Son. How this grant of life to the Son occurs is disputed in contemporary times.⁸⁵

In summary, the personal Name of the time-space interactive Father implies that he is not merely a static and ever-frozen, timeless simplicity – the perfect, unchanging ideal Simplex of Neoplatonism or the syncretistic, S-DDS divinity. The term static means that something will never ever change in anything. Hence static is opposite of dynamic, which implies moving and/or give-and-take interaction. Therefore, if God is pure act (*actus purus*) he cannot be both non-change and dynamism at the same time. Clearly one cannot have both/and. They are contradictory terms. The only way to harmonize these two dialectical opposites is to syncretize in an unstable and contradictory mixture.

Conclusion

Most of the hundreds of millions of believers in the Majority World have never heard of the S-DDS doctrine. They read Scripture and hear the Father’s interactive voice in Christ as he calls them to himself and to growth in his Kingdom through his Spirit (Rom 14:16-17). He himself commissions them to bring the “obedience of faith” to the idolatrous nations through Christ (Rom 1:5). His voice leads them to reject the worldview folly of human wisdom and to build all knowledge and wisdom upon Christ (Col 2:3), and especially upon Christ crucified, which is “foolishness to the Greek.” The Crucified One is now risen, reigning and speaking the Father’s

⁸¹ See e.g., Gen 21:33; Isa 40:28 (אלהי עולם יהוה).

⁸² Or simply “as I live” (e.g., Num 14:21, 28; Isa 49:18; Rom 14:11).

⁸³ This type of life would dwell in frozen undividedness of thought and moment, and within an undivided non-temporality, without interrelationship. In other words, this divinity would be without sequence that is he would be an absolute Unity.

⁸⁴ This is evidenced by the many YHWH compounds and by Christ taking upon himself both the Name (e.g., Jn 8:58) and the Name compounds such as “I AM” “the bread of life,” “the light of the world,” “the resurrection and the life,” “the way [to the Father].” “the truth,” and many more in the Johannine literature especially

⁸⁵ To discuss the atemporal, S-DDS theory of “eternal begottenness” is beyond this paper’s scope.

words through the “demonstration of the Spirit’s power” and the true wisdom of his written revelation (1 Cor 1:23b, 2:2-5, 6-7).

R. Bauckham explains the missionary context and “missionary appeal” of early Christianity. The appeal combined biblical monotheism and the worship of Jesus within the unique identity of the God of Israel. The context was actually similar to much of India today. Greco-Roman “paganism (especially in its philosophically influenced forms),” he writes, “offered the supreme God, abstract and remote from human affairs,” a Platonic divinity similar to that of the S-DDS and Brahman. That context provided “any number of lesser divinities involved in human affairs” as does, for example, contemporary Hinduism.⁸⁶ In other words, the religious context of the first Christian missionaries tried to have the best of two religious ideals, an accessible supernatural power and a simple-divinity.⁸⁷

Only the many gods and lords of Greco-Roman religion were seemingly actually engaged in daily affairs in contrast to the Platonic Simplex. These gods seemed to fill “the real religious needs of ordinary people,” at least in the opinion of popular piety. On the other hand, “Christianity ... recognized the one God, Creator of heaven and earth, who was not merely the philosophical abstraction of Platonic monotheism, but had involved himself in the human world and given himself a worldly identity in Jesus.” Apostolic Christianity alone could “dispense with the worship of the lesser divinities and advocate *exclusive* monotheistic worship” because only in our Lord Jesus is the one true God “religiously accessible.”⁸⁸ To reject this accessible and interactive Father, revealed in the now resurrected God-man through the Spirit, and turn to a Platonic syncretism led the Christian movement into extreme danger in late antiquity and still does today. The danger certainly is the jealous zeal of our Father-God for his exclusive glory.

Consequently, by mixing anti-biblical and biblical content, the unstable S-DDS syncretism tends to strongly blunt the Gospel mandate to bring all peoples the knowledge of our personal Father-God through his living Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, by their Spirit (e.g., Rom 8:16; Jn 14:6-11; 1 Tim 2:5). Certainly, this is Scripture’s universal claim (e.g., Job 18:21; Jer 4:22, 9:24; Hos 6:3; Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 2:13c; 1 Cor 1:30-31).⁸⁹ The only way forward, then, is to call an international hermeneutical community to search out and begin to come to a new consensus. This time we only have “the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” and not a centralized Imperial State to mandate and enforce the new consensus (Eph 4:3; Col 3:15; Php 2:1-2; Jn 17:23). This is as it should be.

⁸⁶ It seems to me that Medieval Christianity with its distant, simple divinity and the ever-tender Virgin and the accessible saints was a cognate religion. Contemporary Orthodox/Roman Christianity still provides a similar context for the coming of a biblical Gospel.

⁸⁷ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 144.

⁸⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 144.

⁸⁹ See, also 1 Cor 1:21; 1 Jn 1:6, 2:3-4, 12-14, 4:6-7; Gal 4:7-8; 1 Thes 4:5; 2 Thes 1:8; Tit 1:16.