

**“The Trinity Is Not Our Social Program” and the Social Arian Temptation:
Recovering from Mortifying Spin – Contextualization
Gone Awry 4 (Christology) (Part I)**

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2020

Abstract

The Trinity *is* our social program, if our understanding of the Triune God is checked by biblical theology and biblical ethics developed within an international hermeneutical community. My thesis is this: “Everlasting Relationships of Following-and-Leading” (ERFL) within the immanent Trinity are founded squarely upon Scripture as read without Neoplatonic, Social Arian lenses. I establish this thesis through a survey of the interactions between the Father and Son in the economic interactions before creation in the covenant of redemption, then in the Son’s work in creation and in redemptive history until and during the incarnation, next after the resurrection and enthronement, and last after the Judgment. I then trace the pattern of Filial-following and Patri-leadership in the dyadic titles ascribed to the Father and Son. Finally, I discuss implications for social theology of a Complementarian Trinity perspective.

Key Words: Trinity, Social Arianism, egalitarian Trinity, complementarian Trinity, culture transformation, social revolutionary doctrines.

Introduction and Thesis

The Trinity *is* our social program, if the terms “Trinity” and “social program” are checked by Scripture and then sharpened within a truly international hermeneutical community to guard against encroaching syncretism (Prv 27:17) (Volf 1998, 403-423; contra Husbands, 2009). Fundamental to my thesis is that a person or people-group inevitably *become(s) like who or what they worship*, as we shall see repeatedly (Pss 115:1-8, 135:15-18; 2 Cor 3:18). Every view of the Trinity, even for those who reject the idea that the Trinity has social relevance, will lead to culture transformation. *No neutrality exists and no escape from social relevance exists*. If the earth’s ethno-cultures are going to be transformed according to whole Bible teaching, these statements are essential because the Trinity is essential (Mt 28:17-20). If any culture is founded upon the wisdom and truth of a true Trinity (Tri-Unity), it will thrive. If not, it will collapse from the accumulated centuries of idolatry as seen by precept and example throughout Scripture.

This and subsequent articles focus especially on *Christology* gone awry. My thesis is as follows: Everlasting Relationships of Following-and-Leading (ERFL) truly exist within the immanent Trinity. The Tri-une Godhead has always consisted of three Persons who share equal value, dignity, majesty, and glory. Yet, at the same time, all three have always interacted with equal glory-yet-diverse roles within the Father’s single Being. Consequently, true equality and real diversity of authority roles are absolutely compatible, because that is what Scripture everywhere reveals our three-one divinity to be like. In the Scriptural revelation of the economy, *the Trinity is always and everywhere led by the Father* with the Son following. This is true in the pre-creational covenant of redemption all the way to after Messiah Jesus presents the universe back to his Father, who becomes “all in all.”

I maintain that it is legitimate, therefore, to carefully infer backwards from these revealed economic relationships to the everlasting divine metaphysical time (DMT) of the ontological Trinitarian relationships before the covenant of redemption. Several other indications (e.g., God-Word, Glory-Radiance relationship) also demonstrate that this has always been the internal immanent way the Godhead *is*, was, and will always be. Hence, the following of the Son and leading of the Father in the economy is not temporary.

Further, whenever an ethno-culture's worldview becomes grounded upon a view of the relationship of unity and diversity that prioritizes the equality of unity above any diversity, it will self-destruct. This worldview concept will become a Pac-Man that devours all social freedom and created diversity in an egalitarian collective. The envisioned result is a communal-collective in which everyone is supposed to be absolutely and interchangeably equal, with no social hierarchies and no social boundaries. An updated slogan of the French Revolution could well be "Equality, Liberty, and a unitary family of Humanity." Such a viewpoint encapsulates the contemporary boast that equality is absolutely morally better than maintaining created social diversities. In contrast, our Lord provides a strong indication that true social unity and real, created, social diversity can exist in harmony when he prays, "Let them be one as we are one" (Jn 17:11, 23). His ideal social model is actually modeled on the Tri-Unity of his relationship with his Father (and by implication also with the Spirit). His new creation community in vital union with him is truly diverse – bi-gender, multi-ethnic, and multi-class – yet is also truly a unified community because only the Son's new-creation diverse and unified community *reflects* the immanent-ontological Trinity. Hence, an accurate understanding of the Trinity *is* our social program.

Unfortunately, the Trinity within the classic tradition has too often been relegated to being a mere thought puzzle with little practical relevance to social systems. This type of relegation is especially true of Latin scholastic Trinitarianism, but also definitely occurs in earlier Greek and Latin Christianity as well (Hennessy 2007). However, as several scholars demonstrate in the last half century, such as the VanTillians, Frame, Poythress, and Rushdoony in the USA, and especially Colin Gunton in the UK, only a correct Trinitarian view builds a stable social order in all spheres of life. Therefore, what I term *Social Arianism* prioritizes the intuited moral value within the ontological Trinity of a simple-egalitarian unity above any real diversity of the Godhead. Within this simplist tradition that includes a timeless, strongly immutable, and impassive deity are hidden deadly Neoplatonic presuppositions, as occurs within Augustine (Mullins 2013, 181). Robert Jenson summarizes: "Throughout his writings," Augustine possessed an "unquestioning commitment to the axiom of his antecedent [neo]Platonic theology, that God is metaphysically 'simple,' that no sort of self-differentiation can really be true of him" (Jenson 1997, 111). The Cappadocians before and Aquinas after him held to the same presuppositional syncretism.

Does Scripture Support a Complementarian or Egalitarian Trinity?

I have established elsewhere the biblical foundations of a doctrine of the Trinity without this mortifying and debilitating Neoplatonic (NP) syncretism (Kreitzer 2019a, 2019b, 2016); readers unfamiliar with these earlier articles would do well to read them now. This article seeks to demonstrate an alternative "Everlasting Relationships of Following-and-Leading" (ERFL) thesis by Scriptural evidence and sound deduction from that data. Two other alternative explanations of exercising authority and following authority exist: 1) The Eternal Subordination of the Son

(ESS) or Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS) (Grudem 1994; 2012) and 2) Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission (ERAS) (e.g., Ware 2005; Strachan and Peacock 2016). I reject both for reasons given in the ensuing discussion. (Subsequent articles will map out the truly social-revolutionary implications of taking this classic simplist tradition (mentioned above) alongside and even above the clear teaching of Scripture and worshipping a syncretistic deity based upon the priority of unity over diversity).

In summary, world Christians have two main options: *Complementarian Trinitarianism*, allowing freedom for real, created, social diversity, or *Egalitarian Trinitarianism* with its concomitant, *Social Arianism*. First, J. Scott Horrell agrees: “For egalitarian trinitarians, eternal social differentiation in the Godhead is perceived as ultimately incompatible with triune equality-” (Horrell 2004, 209). In the economy the Son is man, following the Father. In his divinity, he is absolutely equal with the Father and potentially could have exchanged economic roles with him/her/it in another putative creation. Second, on the other hand, many complementarian Trinitarians teach that each person in the ontological Trinity has always ever-lived in an everlasting “social order— [a] characteristic way of experiencing divine koinonia” (Horrell 2004, 409; see also Jenson 1997, 111-112). The Father is always the Initiator and Planner. The Holy Spirit is always glorifying and executing the decisions (albeit mutually made) of the Father through the Son. And it was always befitting that the everlasting Son become incarnate as the Son of Man and Son of God.

The Father’s Leadership in the Covenant of Redemption before Creation

I opt for the second of these two options. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone, not *solo Scriptura*) is the final authority in this choice. First, it establishes the Father’s supreme and unique leadership role before the creation in what many theologians term “the covenant of redemption” (*pactum salutis*) (see, e.g., 2 Tim 1:9-10; Eph 1:1-14; Rev 13:8; 1 Pet 1:1-2; Fesko 2018). Luke in Acts is explicit about the Father’s role even in planning the cross: “This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23); and, “They did what your power and will [ἡ βουλή] had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4:28). This all occurred in a pact between the Father and the Son by which he agrees to become the Kinsman Redeemer of the Father’s chosen people (family). As such he will be the Older Brother and Firstborn of the family, and the Victor over all of his Father’s enemies both visible and invisible (Eph 1:3-14, 19b-21; Col 1:12-18, 2:10, 15; Heb 2:14-15; Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; Rom 8:28-30; Kreitzer 2017, 2020). To accomplish all of this the Son freely agrees to be the substitute for his Father’s chosen family as both the Second Adam and as their human King and High Priest (e.g., Ps 2:7, 110:1-4; Zec 6:13; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15; Heb 2, 5-7), so as to fulfill all their broken covenant responsibilities (Gal 4:1-7; Rom 5:17), and agrees to submit to their curse for their treason in their place (Gal 3:12-14; Rom 3:24-27).

In this covenant, the *Father* purposed, foreknew, and pre-chose Christ’s people that will eventually include all peoples grafted into the single commonwealth of Israel and blessed in Christ with blessing every blessing of the Spirit. The Son and Spirit followed the Father’s leadership (Eph 1-2; Ps 22:27-28). Wayne Grudem agrees: “But if we are to be faithful to the meaning of ... Eph 1:3-5, [we] still must say that in the eternal councils of the Trinity, there was a role of planning, directing, initiating, and choosing, that belonged specifically to the Father” (Grudem 2012, 233).

The Father thus predestined them to enter union with his blessed Son; and pre-planned to work everything for their good to accomplish the counsel of his plan (Rom 8:28-29). He does this “before” – a temporal word – “the foundation of the world,” that is before the creation (Mt 25:34; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8). This foreordaining work of the Father occurred not in a totally-other, atemporal Simple Oneness, but within the tri-personal counsel in interactive Divine Metaphysical Time (DMT) (Kreitzer 2016). Any other interpretation is eisegesis, *reading Neoplatonic presuppositions into key texts*, and building upon Tradition and Scripture not Scripture alone.

Consequently, the Son is the Heir of the Father and shares the Father’s everlasting DMT. The Son (and the Spirit) mutually share in the Father’s glorious, ever-living, single-yet-diverse Being. As a gift from our Abba, all things belong to us as joint heirs of Christ: “All things belong to you.” The reason is that “you [all] belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God,” the Father (1 Cor 3:22-23, cf. 1 Cor 11:3; Rom 8:17). Paul proclaims the same in Romans. From Christ and his decision; comes all things: “For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom 11:36). The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ever shares his Being with the Son (and the Spirit) so that through the Son by the Spirit. The result is that “Honor and eternal power belong to him [the Father]! Amen” (1 Tim 6:16 ISV). Certainly, our Lord shares that same blessing and honor because he is the Heir. He is furthermore, also, the Lamb, who sits with the King of kings and Lord of lords on his throne. The Father’s singular yet glorious Being is “invisible,” “spirit” and “unapproachable light,” yet Christ, always one with the the Father, is the outshining radiance of his glory (Jn 4:24, 6:46, see also Jn 1:18, 10:30-33; 1 Tim 6:15-16; 1 Jn 1:5; Rev 5:13).

“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24-25). Notice here also the authority and priority the Lord’s brother Jude gives to *the Father*, whom he calls “the only God our Savior” (cf. Jn 17:3). He prioritizes the Father’s glory and authority, a glory he exercises *solely and only* “through Jesus Christ our Lord [κύριος, kurios = YHWH].” He exercises this “before” all created ages because our God is not atemporal (Kreitzer 2016). Therefore, the Lord Jesus *has always* shared the one-of-a-kind divine identity of the Father. As Richard Bauckham reminds us, throughout the NT Jesus shares the Father’s “unique identity” (true unity) but does not share the Father’s personally distinctive quality (property) (Bauckham 2008, ix). That unique property is his leading authority that is his real diversity from the Son.

As we shall see, on the other hand, some teach that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all absolutely equal in sharing the unique identity of “the [one] Name” and therefore are absolutely interchangeable in authority in other potential creations. These teachers prioritize the oneness of the Godhead over the true everlasting diversity. Consequently, these teachers begin a process of absorbing the real diversity within the Godhead into its unity. Certainly, this classic tradition does not go so far as does thorough-going Modalism, but it does draw incredibly near to that schismatic teaching. Again, this process and subsequent worship given to this non-biblical divinity is surely syncretistic and is another permutation of encroaching Neoplatonic philosophy (Mullins 2013; Van den Brink 2014).

The point is this. The Father has always shared his singular yet diverse Spirit-Being with the true personal diversities belonging to his Word (Son) and their Spirit. At the same time, *Scripture always reveals the Father as the one who leads, takes initiative, and shines out as the source* of the radiance which we see in the face of our Lord (2 Cor 3:18, 4:6; Heb 1:1-3). Our Lord is “Light from Light.” Hence, there is no generic “divine nature” but that nature is the Father’s, which Christ fully shares, and we only partake in those communicable attributes that God can share and maintain the Creator-creature distinction (1 Cor 3:21-23). Consequently, even “before” the creation and the beginning of Cosmic Physical Time (CPT), God the Father has priority in the order of the Trinity and leads the Son while the Father and Son lead the Spirit. He is always the first person of the Trinity throughout biblical revelation, including in those glimpses of Divine Metaphysical Time (DMT) that we have in Scripture. There is only one “Name” (YHWH) (unity of the Godhead), but also within that one name dwell the *ordered* diversities of first the Father, second the Son, and third the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:18). This divine unity and diversity cannot be explained away with a prior “we know” that this is certainly analogical “anthropomorphic” language. Only by presupposing the Bible’s definition of Trinity as possessing both true unity and real diversity can any human reader from any ethno-linguist group discern that in divine metaphysical time the Father has always had priority and authority (true diversity) to work through the Son by the Spirit to accomplish the consensual divine plan.

Biblical Evidence

For further evidence, pay close attention in the following selection of passages supporting the Father’s leadership in this covenant-counsel of redemption and the Son’s willing following *before* the creation (Grudem 2012, 233). Italics accentuate time orientating words, and ***bold italics*** emphasizes the Father’s authority.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every blessing of the Spirit in the heavenly places, even as ***he chose us*** in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ***he*** predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of ***his will*** [εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος]- (Eph 1:3-5, based on the ESV).

[The Father] ***made known*** to us the mystery of ***his will*** according to ***his good pleasure***, which ***he purposed*** in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we *were* also chosen [***by the Father*** – divine passive], having been *predestined* according to the ***plan of him*** who works out everything in conformity with the ***purpose of his will*** (Eph 1:9-11).

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to [***the Father’s***] ***purpose***. For those whom ***he foreknew he also predestined*** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom ***he predestined he also called***, and those whom ***he called he also justified***, and those whom ***he justified he also glorified*** (Rom 8:28-30).

[***The Father***] ... saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of ***his own purpose and grace***, which ***he gave*** us in Christ Jesus *before the ages began* (2 Tim 1:9).

To those who reside as aliens, ... who are chosen [divine passive] according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood (1 Pet 1:1-3).

Wayne Grudem summarizes: “The role of planning, purposing, predestining for the entire history of salvation belongs to the Father, according to Scripture. There is no hint of any such authority for the Son with respect to the Father” (Grudem 2012, 233). Consequently, from the time of the Covenant/Council of Redemption up to Paul’s time, the Father was the sole leader. This conclusion is further strengthened in the following.

The Father’s Leadership in Creation

The most well-known of the passages speaking about the leadership of the Father’s acts in the creation as he created through the Son are the following. I have put brief editorial comments in brackets: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was [living/existing] in the beginning with God. All things were made [divine passive for “God, the Father, made” – see Jn 1:18] through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (Jn 1:1-3 ESV).

Clearly, the “Word of God” in John’s first chapter is a mediatorial concept, applicable to both revelation and creation. The Father *initiated* the speaking, while the speaking itself was the Word himself manifested in creative actions (Gen 1) and in the incarnation, as both John 1:14 and John 1:18 make clear. The Word *is* the Son. That the Word is the Son is clear also in the following passage: “In these last days [God, the Father] has spoken to us [uniquely] by/in [ἐν] his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1:1-2 ESV). Again, the Father speaks, appoints, creates through his Son, who is also implicitly the incarnation of the spoken-thought of the Father and his final Word. Consequently, for Paul as for the Lord himself, the Father is the “one God,” “the only God,” “the only wise God” (see Jn 5:44, 17:3; 1 Thes 1:9; 1 Tim 1:17), yet at the same time our Lord before the incarnation was always existing in the external glory of his Father [ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων] and was “equal with God” [τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ] (Php 2:6-7) and the one *through whom* the Father receives glory: “To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Rom 16:27).

Consequently, Paul, clearly, is resolute and consistent: “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, *from whom* are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom* are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6; see Eph 4:4). As Richard Bauckham points out, this confession is most likely based on the Shema, which states there exists only one God and Lord (Bauckham 2008, 211-218). Yet at the same time, 1 Corinthians 8:6 indicates that, within the unity of the single Being, different economic roles have existed and have been exercised even before creation. Last, Jesus is presently [ἐστίν – present active indicative], quite possibly in the pregnant sense of always being in the past and future, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over [NIV] all creation. For *by him* all things were created [at the Father’s command – divine passive], in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him [δι’ αὐτοῦ – divine intermediate means] and for him” (Col 1:15-16 ESV).

The same pattern exists throughout the NT literature. The Father initiates with his own authority (“from him”) through the mediatorial work of the Word/Son (“through whom”), who carries out the plan, purpose, desire of his Abba, Father in the process of creation and upholding

the universe “by his powerful word” (see also Col 1:17; Heb 1:3; Grudem 2012, 243). Certainly, all these passages clearly discuss aspects of the economy of creation and redemption, but the texts also give definite hints that this order (τάξις) may also be essential or ontological and not merely economic.

The Father’s Leadership in the Incarnation of the Christ

YHWH the Father sends the Theanthropos. The Father promises to send the Son in the OT revelation. He fulfilled the promise and sent the Son for the benefit “of the faith of God’s chosen ones” so that they can come to know the truth and possess the certain hope of everlasting life, “which God [the Father], who cannot lie, promised before time belonging to [earth’s] ages” – in other words in God’s time stream, the Divine Metaphysical Time (DMT) (Tit 1:2).

In the outworking of earth-time (CPT), the Father provided many explanations of the pre-CPT promise made in the covenant of Redemption. Two of the most important of these promises, for the purposes of this discussion, in the OT are Isaiah 9:6-7 and 48:16. Isaiah 9 comes at the end of a larger pericope (Is 7:1-9:7); and is situated in the first of Isaiah’s three sections, “The Book of the Coming King.” The theme is a coming scion of the house of David, who will be named “Immanuel” or “God with us” and who will be born of a virgin (Is 7:14). The passage ends with the prophecy that this Coming One will be prominent in Galilee of the idolatrous nations to the north of Jerusalem, the City of David (Is 9:1-5; Mt 4:13-16). He will hear the called-out salutations of his people, consisting of four couplets that consist of titles only YHWH himself carries: “Wonderful-Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father-King [of his people], and Prince of Peace.” Yet, paradoxically, the text states that this mysterious, fully-divine figure will also be virgin-born and fully human, so that he pre-figures Yehoshua-Jesus in the *Carmen Christi* song in Philippians 2. Jesus is born “unto us” – the Jewish people, as “a son” of David’s dynasty. The prophecy and its fulfillment in the Kingdom of Immanuel will be accomplished by YHWH-Shabaoth himself: “The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will accomplish this” (Is 9:7). Consequently, the text distinguishes the promised Theanthropos from the one accomplishing the promised Kingdom, and by implication, distinguishes the One sending from the Anointed, Reigning King “Mighty God” and “Prince of Peace.”

The second passage is much more disputed. It is situated in the second of Isaiah’s three books, “The Book of the Suffering-Servant King”: “Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit” (Is 48:16). Here the pre-incarnate Messiah, speaking in and through Isaiah as the “Spirit of Jesus” and “the Spirit of Christ,” makes astonishing claims of being equal with the Creator of all things (see 1 Pet 1:11; cf. Acts 16:7). The context seems to indicate that the speaker is not the prophet but the Coming Suffering-King. The “I” and “Me” speaking throughout the pericope says that he called Jacob/Israel, created the heavens and earth, and called Cyrus. He entitles himself YHWH: “I am He; I am the first, and I am the last” (Is 48:12), titles Jesus appropriates for himself in *both* John 8:58 (“Before Abraham was I AM”) and Revelation 1:17 (see Rev 22:13), quoting this very verse. Notably, Israel’s King and Redeemer YHWH, most likely the Father; applied to himself exactly the same Name earlier in the book (Is 44:6). Finally, the passage we are examining makes the last first person claim about the speaker. It is one of pre-existence (at the creation) and being sent with the Spirit by another with the shared Name, YHWH. Only our Lord Messiah fits this description:

Come near to Me, listen to this:

From the first I have not spoken in secret,

From the time it took place, I was there.

And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit: (Is 48:16 NASB).

The NASB and NKJV show by the capitalization of “has sent Me” that the translators agree with this conclusion. However, again, these are economic passages, yet they are still part of an accumulating inductive case that will be completed with a final deduction.

The Sending of the Theanthropos in the Gospels, First John, and Paul’s Letters

The Scriptures clearly speak elsewhere of the Father sending his Son, the God-Man. First, key passages are found in the Gospel of John, which report the sending of the Son to the earth. These are either from John’s commentary on his Lord’s mission or in the words of the Lord from heaven himself. The most well-known of these passages are John 3:16 and 17, which claim that the Father took the initiative to give and to send his Son into the human world of language and people-groups. This sending of the Son is a major theme in John’s Gospel and First Letter (e.g., also Jn 5:37, 6:39, 1 Jn 4:9, 10, 14), but the Synoptics also use the same language: “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Lk 10:16 NIV; see Mt 10:40).

In addition, Jesus also explicitly mentions the sending of a “beloved son” in one of his parables as well. In this case, the land owner, clearly representing the Father having authority, sends his messengers to collect rent (the prophets), and then finally sends his “one beloved son that he had” [ἓνα εἶχεν υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν], whom the tenants murdered because he was the sole heir. This “son” clearly represents Jesus, the only-begotten, beloved Son and Sent One (Mk 12:1-9; Mt 21:36-46; Lk 20:9-18). In all these passages, a father was already the ruling initiator before the sending of his son, the one who listened and followed his father’s instruction. As in the case of Moses and Joshua sending the spies, the sender has higher rank and thus possesses authority to send those who follow the lead and mandate of the sender. Yet at the same time, the spies and the two leaders actually shared an equal human dignity because they share in the same human *imago Dei* (image of God). Analogously, also, just as the Father sent the Spirit to the earth – through Christ and as Christ’s representative – so he has highest rank and authority to send (Jn 14:26; cf. per Acts 1:4).

Second, just as he was sent by his Father the Lord Messiah does nothing of his own initiative but only as first prompted and led by the Father. This point is clear from several passages in John’s Gospel but also includes a few in the Synoptics as well. For example, “Jesus replied, ‘Truly, truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself, unless He sees the Father doing it. For whatever the Father does, the Son also does’” (Jn 5:19); and, “By myself I can do nothing [ἀπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ, ap’ emautou; from myself, “on My own initiative” – NASB]; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me” (Jn 5:30 NIV). The account of the Samaritan woman at the well; is also perspicuous: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work:” (Jn 4:34 BSB). This theme of the Father’s leading includes the Son’s cross-work: “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me” (Jn 8:28 NASB).

Our Lord makes clear his calling and mission: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me” (Jn 6:38 BSB; Ovey 2016). Here Messiah Jesus states that he possessed a will or set of desires [τὸ θέλημα] carried with him from heaven, but his core desire is to do the desire/will [τὸ θέλημα] of the Father. God, the Father, sent him to build his community just as he “[God the Father] desired” [θέλω] it to be like (1 Cor 12:18). With the Spirit, who also determinately-desires (βούλομαι, e.g., 1 Cor 12:11), the three desires and one leading desire, that of the Father, operate together as a “mutual work of the Father, Son, and Spirit, each exercising the mode of agency given by his inner-triune role as God” (Jenson 1997, 111). The result is a single act of Trinitarian will or decision-making. Re-interpreted by biblical data, the classical Christian intuition can be substantiated. One-will prevails as all three persons with their own desires work out together one decision/will. Christ’s dependency and his following agency carry on until the resurrection and last judgment because the Father delegated to him authority: “But even if I do judge, My judgment is true, because I am not alone when I judge; I am with the Father, who sent Me” (Jn 8:16) and “the Father judges no one, but has entrusted [delegated] all judgment to the Son” up until the Last Day (Jn 5:22, see 23-27). Our Lord Jesus “came with his Father’s authority” (Jn 5:43) and after that Last Day and its Judgment, Christ presents his authority back to the Father, as considered below.

Third, Paul also explicitly mentions the Father sending his Son at the proper time, presumably set by his authority as is the second coming: “At just the right time” (καιρός, kairos), “in the fullness of time [χρόνος, chronos]” the Father sent “his own Son” (Rom 5:5, see 8:3; Gal 4:4; Eph 1:9-10). The Galatians 4:4 and Ephesians 1:9-10 passages in context unmistakably demonstrate the Father’s authority in setting the right time for the sending of the Son.

The Father’s Leadership in the Person and Work of Christ

All of the passages discussed so far imply that the Father was the one who possesses supreme authority during the whole time-span from the covenant of redemption up to and including the incarnate life of the Messiah. Again, the Lord affirms the Father’s authority plainly by stating that his Father was “of higher rank than all” (pantōn meidzon estin, πάντων μεϊζόν ἐστιν) *including himself* in his (then) present tense, always-existing oneness [ἐν ἑσμεν] with God, the Father: “The works that I do in my Father’s name testify about me.... My sheep listen to My voice.... No one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me is [higher rank] than all. No one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:25-30). For the following reasons, “higher rank than all” is a better translation than “greater than all” (NIV) in this passage. In the the LXX and NT, πάντων μεϊζόν ἐστιν in similar contexts almost always means, or strongly implies, “higher rank” not “greater power.” Notice especially the following: Ex 18:s11 LXX, and Jn 4:12 [higher rank than Jacob], 8:53 [higher rank than Abraham], 15:20 [slave not higher in rank than his owner]; 1 Jn 3:20 [God is certainly possessing a higher authority-rank over our hearts], 4:4 [μεϊζων ἐστιν, of higher authority and rank is he]; Mt 11:11 [higher rank than John the Baptist], 12:6 [higher authority and rank than the temple], 12:41-42 [higher rank than Solomon and Jonah], and even 13:32 [higher tallness than the herbs].

Yet also observe that Jesus is speaking in John 10 of his unity with the Father, a concept, as Richard Bauckham reminds us, derived from the “shema” (Dt 6:4; Bauckhan 2008, 104-106). Jesus’s union with the Father certainly means that both Father and Son share the one Name, YHWH, “the one who was, is, and is to come.” Consequently, “I and my Father are-continually

one” (ἔσμεν, present active indicative), an indication that this “higher rank” of the Father is *always* existing in the ever-living Name, *equally shared* by the Father as leader, and Son, as the one following. This definitely hints that the relationship of Father to Son, one of following and leading, is everlasting-eternal. King Jesus, hence, was “the one whom the Father set apart as his very own” – before the creation of the world as explained earlier – “and sent into the world.” He asks, “Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God's Son’?” – one with the Father (Jn 10:30, 36), referring back to the previous context of his true unity and yet at the same time real rank-distinction with the Father.

The classical Tradition's standard exegesis has simply been to relegate this whole discussion to temporal economic matters, by-passing the dilemma of rank in the immanent, single Being of the Father, shared equally by the Son and Spirit. Such exegesis seems wrong-headed. Furthermore, no one disputes the Father's authority in the passages examined as it is clearly in the economy of creation and redemption. Yet, still, these passages are part and parcel of the systematic evidence that shows a consistent pattern from the pre-creational covenant of redemption to after the handing over the kingdom by the Son to the Father, so that he would be all in all, as we shall continue to see.

The Father's Leadership after the Ascension to after the End

The same following-leading relationship, interestingly enough, remained just before the Crucifixion as well. The Lord Jesus confessed that he was not yet then privy – because he voluntarily put aside the external glory of full divinity – to the timing of the Second Coming because that was the purview of the Father alone: “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mt 24:36). The exact same relationship continued until just before the Ascension. In Acts, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” His reply is revealing as the authority relationship between Father and Son continues even after the Resurrection: “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed *by His own authority*” (Acts 1:6-7, italics added).

Daniel 2:21 seems to be an intertextual background reference in the Lord's and the Apostles' minds because of the terms “times and seasons” and “kingdom.” In both contexts, only Elohim (God the Father) can set up kingdoms and change the times. Also, in the context of Daniel 2, Elohim must describe the Father because the Coming King (Jesus) is mentioned as a distinct figure in the vision, which describes the Rock cut out without hands (Christ) by whom the “God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed” (Dan 2:44). Further, in both contexts the Father has the right to do so “*by His own authority*” (emphasis added; Acts 1:7; Dan 2:20-21; see 1 Tim 6:15).

Further confirmation of the ultimate authority of the Father is the present session of the Lord. When he returns to heaven, the Father seats him “at the right hand of God,” “the Mighty God” or “the Father” (e.g., Col 3:1; Lk 22:69; 1 Pet 3:22), or “of the Majesty in heaven” (Heb 8:1, see 12:2), using terminology gleaned from Psalm 110:1: “YHWH said to my Lord-Adoni, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Clearly “God, the Father,” here YHWH, has the final authority as the “One who put everything under Him” (1 Cor 15:24a, 27c, my trans.). Then, most fascinating of all, this *sole* Patri-leadership pattern continues into the Apocalypse. The Father *gave* the Revelation to the Son, who, in turn as the Commander of the heavenly armies, sent his angel to show it to John: “The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God

[the Father] gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John” (Rev 1:1).

Last, and this is a very strong statement, the following-leading relationship will continue into the everlasting future ages. Again using language gleaned from Psalms 110, and the pattern is similar in the other key enthronement Psalm (Ps 2), Paul says that Jesus must continue reigning with the Father’s grant of authority (cf. Jn 17:2; Mt 28:17-20) *until* every enemy, the last being death, is totally conquered. Then he gives the whole bought-and-won universe back to his Father, “God himself,” so that the Son himself “will be made [again] subject to the Father that he, the God [ὁ Θεός] – the definite article is significant – would be all in all, *falsifying* the Social Arian narrative by contextually affirming his leading role in the triune community.

What the following passage implies, certainly, has been a matter of ancient discussion. But what is clear is that the Father is the Leader, the Authority, the Majesty and that the Son shares it with him:

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:24-28 NIV).

Last, the Lord Jesus calls God, his God, and the Father, his Father analogous to how we call upon him as God and Father. Yet, uniquely and distinctly different from our relationship with him. He said to Mary in the Garden of the Tomb: “Do not cling to Me ... for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and tell My brothers, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God’” (Jn 20:17 BSB). Yet paradoxically, but wonderfully, the Father turns around in Psalm 45:6-7 and 102:25-27 (cited in Heb 1:8-12) and also calls the Son Creator, everlasting Ruler-God (ὁ Θεός, ho Theos) and Lord (κύριος, kurios). The NT authors use the title kurios very often to apply to Jesus in OT passages they quote. In addition, since kurios translates the divine Name YHWH, they mean he is *equal* in divinity to God (the Father) and “shares his unique divine identity,” again to use Richard Bauckham’s terms (see e.g., Php 2:7; Rom 10:11-12-).

As a result, the Latin church recognized the oneness of Being between the Father and the Son by continually citing “I and my Father are one” (Jn 10:30) and “these three are one” from the Vulgate (1 Jn 5:7-8). The two equal sharers of mutual divinity give each other mutual praise and glory because, as our Lord prays, “Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world existed” (Jn 17:5). Yet this “oneness” is true unity and real diversity of following and leading. The human community “in me,” the Lord prays, should “be a single community corresponding to the uniqueness of the one God in which he and his Father are united (Jn 17:11, 22; Bauckham 2008, 105).

Certainly there is no absolute interchangeable equality in just human communities because they reflect analogously the unity and diversity of the Father’s single Being. Equality of value, importance, and human dignity, for example, between magistrate and citizens, parents and their children, husband and wife, elder and members does not obviate their differences in authority-

role. Humans are equal under the same-single standard of divine justice but not equal in interchangeable person and authority roles (Rom 2:6-16; Ex 12:49; Lev 24:22; Num 9:14, 15:15-16; Dt 1:16). Any other schema is social revolutionary, often rejecting with violence any roles that include followers and leaders, wealthy and poor distinctions, and even created male and female functions, as subsequent articles shall demonstrate.

In summary of the biblical evidence, in all of the mutual operations of the Three, all of which occurred in a long time line starting before the Creation until Christ's final victorious presentation of the re-conquered universe to his Father, God the Father always and everywhere led and the Son followed. God, the Father, "put all things under [the Theanthropic Messiah's] feet: "For the Scriptures say, "God has put all things under his [Christ's] authority [feet]." (Of course, when it says "all things are under his authority," that does not include God [the Father] himself, who gave Christ his authority)" (1 Cor 15:27 NLT). God, the Father was exempt, of course, from the Messiah's authority so that after the victory presentation, he *once again* becomes "all in all": "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:23). This referent is unmistakably and undeniably clear. The Father, as Leader of the Three, subjected all things to the Son before the Creation as we have seen. He subjected nature, demons, sickness, and gravity to the Son in the Incarnation, in practice. Last, he subjects all things to the Son until the Last Judgment at which time he takes up the "all in all" status as Supreme leader after that Final Judgment.

Therefore, preliminarily, would it not be a correct logical deduction to teach that the Father was the leader of the Triune community before the covenant of redemption as well? Part II of this article will consider one more set of biblical data before reaching a final conclusion and application.

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