
“This is the best handbook I have seen on the existence and nature of the Triune God. It is biblically based, theologically sound, well documented, and clearly written. I highly recommend it.”

— DR. NORM GEISLER

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WHO IS



THE DOCTRINE AND EXISTENCE OF GOD

KENNY RHODES



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ISBN: 978-1-4908-6490-7 (sc)
ISBN: 978-1-4908-6491-4 (hc)
ISBN: 978-1-4908-6489-1 (e)

ENDORSEMENTS

This is the best handbook I have seen on the existence and nature of the Triune God. It is biblically based, theologically sound, well documented, and clearly written. I highly recommend it.

– **Norm Geisler**, author or co-author of some 90 books. He has taught for over 50 years at some of the top evangelical seminaries in the country. He was president of The Evangelical Theological Society and was the founder and first president of The Evangelical Philosophical Society.

“Every Christian needs to be a theologian. That is every believer in Christ needs to be able to think carefully and speak clearly and correctly about the Triune God of the Bible. Unfortunately, our evangelical churches today do not often teach believers the foundations of Christian theology. Therefore, for all of those who need to sharpen their theological thinking, including pastors and teachers, Dr. Kenny Rhodes’s book ‘The One Who Is’ provides a careful and insightful presentation of the historic Christian doctrine of God.”

– **Ken Samples**, theologian, author, lecturer and Senior Research Scholar at Reasons to Believe.

“Dr. Kenny Rhodes is a great, young, up and coming theologian who will be one to watch in years to come.”

– **Dr. Mal Couch**, theologian, professor, pastor, award winning author, founding president of Tyndale Theological Seminary, TX and the co-founding vice president of Scofield Seminary, CA.

“Dr. Kenny Rhodes has given to us in this book a masterful presentation on the doctrine of God. With a rare, yet much needed, coalescing methodology he articulates a view

of God that encompasses all of the classical issues for an Evangelical and Orthodox position while at the same time approaching the subject with a careful hand that incorporates into the presentation a wealth of ideology from St. Thomas Aquinas. This rare blend I believe gives aid to the theological endeavor of uniting the fields of common grace and special grace into one harmonious and holistic system. In an age where the hard sciences and theological sciences have been bifurcated for far too long, especially in the academic universities, I believe this type of theological model can help lead others back to a healthy synthesis of the two fields that without doubt have their roots in the one God who authored the entire Universe. Furthermore, his treatment handles with skill, balance, and integrity the tougher subjects that pertain to God's sovereignty and man's accountability and responsibility before God. His discussion of something he labels as a "dynamic immutability" is alone worth every theologian's time to ponder and consider with a pliable spirit. Of course, even if one does not embrace exactly the same conclusions as Dr. Rhodes, he or she still cannot but help to find a rich blessing in this most remarkably researched monograph. Meticulous notes and a magnanimous bibliography support this work and thus it can bolster any theologian's own personal research. Lastly, I endorse this work not just because of the information within the book itself. Though that is important, needless to say, I also endorse this book because of the character of the man behind the typed words. Dr. Rhodes does not write this book (or any book I know of) to build an empire, to enrich himself, or to enshrine his name. Rather, Kenny writes to evangelize others, to encourage us, to energize us, and to edify us in the Glory, Goodness, and Greatness of our God, an endeavor that I believe he faithfully accomplishes in his effervescent effort."

– **Dr. Keith Sherlin**, judge, author, pastor, and Professor of Bible and Theology, Tyndale Theological Seminary, TX.

DEDICATION

Tami, my Sweet— I love you!

Tajiana, Micaela, and Kent... my greatest blessings from the Lord— Dad loves you!

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SECTION I

Knowing God

CHAPTER ONE

The Study of God—Theology

Just as the Father is “the One who is” (Exod. 3: 14), so likewise is his Word the “One who is, God over all” (Rom. 9: 5). Nor is the Holy Spirit nonexistent but truly exists and subsists.

—Athanasius, *Concerning the Holy Spirit*

The doctrine of God lies at the heart of sacred doctrine, whose formal object is to know God, and all other things in relation to God.

—St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*

The word *theology* is comprised of two Greek words— θεός (theos) “God” and λόγος (logos) “word,” “logic,” “reason,” “communication,” “speech,” “utterance,” or “expression.” Thus, theology means the logical communication or expression of the truths of God.¹ It is a methodological and systematic study of the things of God. A.H. Strong defines theology as “the science of God and of the relations between God and the universe.”² Therefore, theology is the logical study of the things about and pertaining to God. Further, theology or theologos (θεολογος) is grounded in the fact that *theos* (θεός) has made Himself known. God’s self-revelation through His *words, works, and ways* make theology possible. In theology, the object

¹ See Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 12-13.

² A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 1.

of knowledge (the Triune God) is actively involved in the disclosure of its truths and content. In this, theology is supreme and preeminent over all the sciences. It is the science of God and all His ways, revealed by God Himself. Theology is supernatural in that God reveals its propositions, its illuminator and interpreter is His Spirit, and the systematizers are to be Spirit-led believers in His Word (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Theology is God, *theos*, revealed through *logos* (John 1:1, 14, 18). Logos philosophically expresses the three greatest questions (*concepts* or *ideas*) that can be asked.

- (1) What is it?
- (2) How do you know it?
- (3) How do you communicate (explain) it?

These three enquiries refer to the concepts of “being,” “knowing,” and “communicating” (or hermeneutics). These concepts can be equally applied to the study of God. In philosophical categories they correspond to *ontology* (being), *epistemology* (knowing), and *hermeneutics* (explaining or communicating). The principles of “being, knowing, and explaining” are also appropriate divisions for the study of Theology Proper. Thomas Aquinas used the three concepts of “logos” as they apply to God in his *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas writes,

Now, because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not. Therefore, we must consider (1) How He is not; (2) How He is known by us; (3) How He is named.³

This is *intelligible being*, *rational knowing*, and *intelligible communication*.⁴ In naming something, you are communicating or

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Complete English ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), I q.3.

⁴ These principles I call **λογος ὄν** (logos ὄν, “intelligible being” Ontology), **λογος γινώσκων** (logos ginōskōn, “rational knowing” Epistemology) and **λογος ἐρμηνεύων** (logos hermēneuōn, “intelligible explaining,” or “communicating” Hermeneutics). My arrangement of Theology Proper follows this three-fold division: “Knowing God,” “God’s Being,” and “Communicating God.” See Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy*

explaining it. When Aquinas says that we know God by “how He is not,” he means that we only have negative knowledge of God’s *essence*, and therefore, we only know God’s *being* by negation— how He is not (this will be explained later).

In this study, we will deal with God’s being (ontology). We will discuss how we can know God (epistemology) and how God is named (hermeneutics). We have the “knowledge” of God through His self-revelation, which is grounded in His “being” and God is “communicated” through His *attributes*, which Aquinas calls the “names of God.”⁵

The study of the “being,” “knowing,” and “naming” of God —the *logos of theos*— is the highest privilege of any rational being, angel or man. Without the Logos (John 1:1, 14), the Theos could not be known (John 1:18), for the Logos is truly God Himself (John 1:1,18; 1 John 5:20, ESV). It is truly in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate *theologos* (Romans 9:5), that the being, knowing, and communicating of God are fully realized (Hebrews 1:1-12).

It is with much fear and humility that this theological work is pursued. We are on holy ground. Let us remove our shoes, lest we mix the impurities of an unclean heart and mind with that which is truly holy, i.e., the Person and Word of God— “the One who is” (Exodus 3:5, 14, LXX; John 8:58).

SOURCE

The underlying principle that makes theology possible is the self-revelation and self-disclosure of God. “God himself . . . must be the only source of knowledge with regard to his own being and relations. Theology is therefore a summary and explanation of the content of God’s self-revelations.”⁶ This revelation is contained in four sources—one primary and three secondary. These sources are the basis upon which a sound theology is established. They are (1) Scripture, (2) Reason, (3) Intuition, and (4) Tradition. Ultimately, these four sources fall under two main categories of revelation, general and special. General revelation is the “Revelation

of Thomas Aquinas, *Modern Scholar Course Guide* (Recorded Books, LLC, 2009) and Peter Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

⁵ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.13.1 and Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two: God, Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003).

⁶ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 25.

[of God] that is available to all persons at all times, particularly through the physical universe, history, and the makeup of human nature.”⁷ Special revelation “involves God’s particular communications and manifestations of himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations that are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings.”⁸ These “sacred writings” are the books contained in the Bible, known as Scripture (γραφη, graphē).

Scripture falls under the category of special revelation and the other three sources fall under the created order, which is general revelation. In the Protestant tradition, it is held that Scripture is first and foremost, “sola scriptura”⁹ (Scripture alone), as the primary source for theology. Scripture is the sole authority in faith and practice for the believer. Robert Reymond writes, “The Holy Scriptures . . . are . . . fundamentally God’s Spirit-inspired, imperishable, coherent Word, they are intrinsically authoritative and man’s only infallible rule for faith and life.”¹⁰ As the word of God, Scripture is the only certain truth that mankind possesses. Scripture is infallible, inerrant, inspired, and unbreakable. It is truth, and it is the means by which the Spirit of God renews the human mind and heart. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes,

By means of the written Word of God, man has become possessed of truth in its full and absolute form. The dim lights of intuition, tradition, and reason, are submerged under the blazing irradiation of revealed truth. No measurement can be placed on the advantage the Word

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Rev. ed., 1st Crossway ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 171.

⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 178.

⁹ The Latin phrase “sola scriptura” was one of the five “solas” of the Protestant Reformation. Sola scriptura refers to the “formal cause” of the Reformation. The issue was one of authority, “where does the believer find his authority for faith (what to believe) and practice (how to live)” — the Church and Scripture, or “Scripture alone.” The “material cause” of the Reformation was “sola fide” (faith alone) as it related to justification. This was the issue of “how can a man be right before God” — by faith and works, or “faith alone.” The other three “solas” are “sola gratia” (grace alone), “solus Christus” (Christ alone), and “soli Deo gloria” (to God alone be glory).

¹⁰ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 44.

of God is to those who humbly receive and profit by its message.¹¹

It is by the word of God that the three secondary sources are to be judged and weighed. The commitment to the primacy of Scripture must govern all theological investigation.¹²

Intuition, “is confidence or belief which springs immediately from the constitution of the mind ... it may be said that intuitive knowledge is that which the normal, natural mind assumes to be true.”¹³ Intuition is the immediate apprehension of undeniable and self-evident truths that are known to the mind *a priori*. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662AD) considered the knowledge of God as intuitively received in the heart.¹⁴ There are many truths that are known and considered intuitive. They include the judgments of right and wrong, mathematical principles like $2+2=4$, the perception of space and time, and the knowledge of cause and effect relationships. Intuition is direct knowledge that is rationally perceived *a priori*. It precedes sense perception, induction, and deduction. Intuitive knowledge should be tested in view of its universality, necessity, and undeniability.¹⁵

¹¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 135.

¹² Any rational Christian epistemology must hold to the absolute authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Even in light of “biblical difficulties,” a presumed inerrancy must govern our approach to Scripture. Inerrancy is a “sublime first principle,” it is grounded in the character of God, and God cannot err! Within the present debate among evangelicals, the non-traditionalists seem to err on the side of a Nestorian bibliology, which emphasizes the human side of Scripture over the divine side. These “neo-inerrantists” (actually, “no-inerrantists”) seem to have a “magical genre-wand” which they wave over a text and claim that the Gospel writer(s) did not intend the passage to be historically accurate. In this author’s opinion one could use genre to deny the resurrection or the virgin birth. It also puts the interpreter over the text of Scripture and is, therefore, very dangerous. For information on this issue see Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation*, Geisler and Farnell, *The Jesus Quest: The Danger from Within*, Mal Couch, *Inerrancy*, Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism*, Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy: the Historical Evidence*, Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, and Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels* all available on Kindle.

¹³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 130.

¹⁴ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 4, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 2005), 50.

¹⁵ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 131.

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Tradition is the historical sight of the Church; it is the observation of the providence of God as He directed His people in the past. As such, all human history is the providential outworking of God's glory and purpose. Concerning theology and tradition, the Spirit of truth that worked in His Church from the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), is the same Spirit that continues to work in the Church today. The theological insights of God's people today will become the tradition of tomorrow and is, therefore, valuable. Tradition is the past-presence of Christ leading His Church into truth by His Spirit. Although tradition can be fallible (as it is not "inspiration proper"), it is profitable for understanding theology and doctrine. Tradition contains the creeds, writings, and historic insights of the doctors of the Church. Tradition is the "treasury of knowledge" in which the greatest minds have made their deposits. Paul Enns writes, "Tradition, in spite of its fallibility, is important in understanding affirmations about the Christian faith. What individuals, churches, and denominations have taught is a necessary consideration in formulating theological statements."¹⁶

Reason is "the highest capacity in man—apart from revelation and the divine energy imparted to man—in his attainment unto the knowledge of God."¹⁷ Reason is the attribute of the human mind to "think God's thoughts after Him." It is part of the image of God (*imago Dei*) in man (Genesis 1:26-27). No other creature on earth has this capacity or dignity. In the exercise of reason, man shares in the nature of God and can be said to be "godlike," it is the participation in the divine light. Norman Geisler explains,

God indeed is subject to logic, but not because there is something more ultimate than he. Since logic represents the principles of rational thought and since *God is a rational Being*, God is subject to his own *rational nature*. Insofar as logic manifests *reason* it flows from *the very nature of God*, and God is subject to his own nature. Indeed, he cannot act contrary to it, ethically or logically.¹⁸

¹⁶ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 151.

¹⁷ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 133.

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 427 (Emphasis added).

Rationality is the expression of the likeness of God in man. Reason is “the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgments logically.”¹⁹ The use of reason is an important instrument in the development of theology. Theology must be intelligible and reflect the rational nature of God. There are three fundamental laws of reason and rational thought. They are evident from the constitution of the human mind, and ultimately, reflect the nature of God. They are (1) the law of non-contradiction (A is not non-A), (2) the law of identity (A is A), and (3) the law of excluded middle (either A or non-A). Together, *faith* and *reason* should be honored in dealing with God’s self-revelation, God being the source of both.²⁰

DIVISIONS

Within theology, there are a number of distinctions used to differentiate the focus of each of its divisions and subcategories. This emphasis, for the most part, has to do with the source or method of approach. Broadly speaking, we may identify the following sources or methods: biblical theology, historical theology, dogmatic theology, contemporary theology, and systematic theology. The nature of this work is within the scope of systematic theology (and apologetics). Lewis Sperry Chafer defines systematic theology as “the collecting, scientifically arranging, comparing, exhibiting, and defending of all facts from any and every source concerning God and His works.”²¹ Within systematic theology, there are a number of divisions that correlate with the expressed teachings of God’s revealed word. These are commonly referred to as doctrines of the Bible. Biblical doctrine may be distinguished as follows: Bibliology (doctrine of the Bible), Theology Proper (doctrine of God), Angelology (doctrine of angels both good and evil), Anthropology (doctrine of man), Soteriology (doctrine of salvation), Ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church), Eschatology (doctrine of

¹⁹ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Aquinas writes, “The light of natural reason itself is a participation of the divine light; as likewise we are said to see and judge of sensible things in the sun, that is, by the sun’s light.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I q.12 a.11 ad.3

²¹ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 6.

last things), Christology (doctrine of Christ) and Pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit).²²

THEOLOGY PROPER

“Theology proper,” Paul Enns writes, “is a category of study within systematic theology; it denotes the study of the nature and existence of God.”²³ Theology proper or the doctrine of God commonly deals with the existence, being, and attributes of God; the tri-unity of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit— one substance or essence in three persons, co-equal in power and glory; and the relation of God to the world, His eternal decrees, and works of creation and providence.²⁴ Given the purpose and design of this work, we will deal with the knowledge, nature, attributes, and subsistence²⁵ of God, leaving the study of the decrees, creation, and providence for another time.

THE PRIORITY OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD (THEOLOGY PROPER)

The importance of the doctrine of God cannot be overstated. It is the bedrock of all theological understanding and the foundation for all philosophical systems. It is the doctrine upon which all other doctrines must be judged and articulated.²⁶ Millard Erickson writes, “The doctrine

²² Ibid., 15-16.

²³ Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 148-49.

²⁴ See Charles Hodge, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 32.

²⁵ “*One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity*” St. Athanasius, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume VII. ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 366.

²⁶ It is the author’s conviction that the doctrine of divine simplicity (and aseity) has more implications for our theological understanding than has been worked out. For example, in light of simplicity, there cannot be any contingent knowledge for God. This point alone renders Molinism and Arminianism false. Simplicity means that what God knows, He wills and what He wills, He knows; all divine attributes are essential in God. Nothing is contingent or accidental for God. Concerning divine simplicity see: Eleonore Stump “*God’s Simplicity*” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Thomas Aquinas trans. by Richard J. Regan, “*The Simplicity of the Divine Essence*” in *The Power of God: By Thomas Aquinas*, Norman Kretzmann, ch. 6 *Intellect in The Metaphysics of Theism*, Thomas Aquinas, I.Q.3 “*On the Simplicity of*

of God is the central point for much of the rest of theology. One's view of God might even be thought of as supplying the whole framework within which one's theology is constructed, life is lived, and ministry is conducted."²⁷ Theology proper is the life-blood of theology and is essential for a healthy and growing faith. Norman Geisler affirms, "Virtually every major doctrine of the faith is based on the doctrine of God."²⁸ To get the doctrine of God incorrect is to fall headlong into an abyss of personal and theological ineptness. "Because worshipers," Geisler continues, "become like the gods they worship, our godliness tends to become like our God. Our concept of God will, therefore, define the limits of our godliness."²⁹ Much of the ineffectuality of the Church today is due to the neglect of, or a false view of the nature of God. The proper understanding of God, as revealed in Scripture, is the foundation and substratum of all reality. One's view of God is the base and blueprint upon which life is built and lived out. On numerous occasions, R. C. Sproul has commented concerning God as the central focus of his life and ministry, specifically the holiness of God. He articulates,

How we understand the person and character of God the Father affects every aspect of our lives. It affects far more than what we normally call the "religious" aspects of our lives.... His holy character has something to say about economics, politics, athletics, romance— everything that we are involved with.³⁰

For the child of God, there is no other pursuit that will produce such lasting effects, now and for all eternity, than to know the nature and character of God. Charles Haddon Spurgeon writes,

God" in *Summa Theologica*. Brian Davies, ch. 3 "What God is Not" in *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God*, James E. Doleal, *God without Parts*, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, *Gregory of Nyssa*, and *the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, all available on Kindle.

²⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 290.

²⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two: God, Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁰ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993).

Dr. Kenny Rhodes

I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.³¹

³¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, "*The Immutability of God*" *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 1*, electronic ed. (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998). Preached January 7, 1855.

CHAPTER TWO

God-views and Worldviews

God-views are simply worldviews or a worldview is simply a God-view. One's perception of God stands at the core of a worldview, and so, it can be called a "God-view." A worldview is how one views or understands the world. A worldview, therefore, makes a world of difference. A worldview is like wearing a pair of sunglasses. It shades all that a person perceives concerning life and eternity. It is the way someone views all of reality (the world) and the important questions of existence. The foundational issue for any worldview is established on the ultimate metaphysical question(s); is there a God and what is God like? All worldviews are systems of thought that are built upon an understanding of the nature and existence of God. Ronald Nash writes, "The most important element of any worldview is what it says or does not say about God."³² A basic understanding of God is inseparable to formulating a supposition upon which to interpret all the data of life. A worldview may be defined as "the standard by which an individual, consciously and unconsciously, interprets all data so as to maintain a consistent and coherent understanding of the whole of reality."³³ The interpretation of reality involves five basic questions of life. The answers to the questions of *meaning, identity, morality, origin, and destiny* (M.I.M.O.D.) are all drastically different from one God-view to another, and they affect everything that a person believes, says, thinks, and does. There are basically four major God-views. As each view is examined,

³² Ronald Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 9.

³³ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense: Responding to the Beliefs and Assumptions of Spiritual Seekers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 39.

our evaluation will be limited to how each worldview deals with the nature of God. Beside our four major God-views, other worldviews have been identified and expounded upon, but they are basically theological distortions or variations of any one of the four major God-views. The views can be simply defined as “one God,” “many gods,” “all is god,” or “no god.” Within these four, all known religions can be categorized.

TRINITARIANISM (BIBLICAL THEISM)

The Trinitarian view of God is a revealed truth of Scripture. It is the self-revelation of God concerning His own nature (subsistence). As a worldview or God-view, it is unique in that it is what God has disclosed concerning Himself. The light of natural reason can discover what has been designated as “naturalistic theism,” but Trinitarianism is a thoroughly revealed Biblical truth.³⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer writes concerning Trinitarianism,

Biblical theism is not, as naturalistic theism, limited to the processes of human reason and to the bare facts concerning the existence of God; it is an unfolding of the details of the marvelous truth concerning God in explicit terms written by divine inspiration [Scripture] and preserved forever.³⁵

³⁴ It is a possibility that the Trinity is revealed in creation (reason), for the “Godhead” (KJV), “divine nature” (ESV), the “deity” (LEB) of God, are “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made [creation]” (Romans 1:20, NKJV). It is unclear whether the revelation of the Trinity (faith) came first and its apprehension in creation (reason) is just a back reading from Scripture. After Christ came, the Trinity could be seen throughout all of the Old Testament, therefore, it is true that those texts were always Trinitarian (the original meaning cannot be changed). But the weakness of man’s intellect, through sin, affected his ability to truly discern the “divine nature” in Old Testament revelation. Of course, progressive revelation must also be considered, but nevertheless, the Old Testament is still divine revelation and this issue is a matter of hermeneutics. The Trinity could be a “mixed article” of reason and faith, but as the existence of God is darkened and confused by sin, so could the understanding of the Trinity in creation. Thomas Aquinas held that the Trinity was only a revealed truth and not a “mixed article,” known by both faith (revelation) and reason (creation). Some theologians suggest that the Trinity can be deduced from creation, even from the constitution of man himself, for it is a “mixed article.” This work will demonstrate how the Trinity is *witnessed* to in the nature of creation.

³⁵ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 180.

Trinitarianism is theism, but theism is not necessarily Trinitarian. Trinitarianism is monotheistic, which makes it part of the theistic worldview. It is treated here separately due to its profound implications as a worldview and its importance to soteriology (the doctrine of salvation).³⁶ A worldview will impact a person's eternal destiny as well as their spiritual maturity. The source of Trinitarianism is the light of the word of God; therefore, its importance cannot be overstated or trivialized. It shines in a dark place and enlightens all of reality. As C. S. Lewis notes, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."³⁷ In the light of Trinitarianism or biblical theism, one can interpret all the realities of life. Trinitarianism can answer the greatest philosophical inquiries into "motion," "being," and the problem of the "one and the many" (or unity in diversity). The Apostle Paul knew his audience well when he declared before the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, that in God "*we live and move and exist* [*have our being,*" NKJV]" (Acts 17:18).³⁸ Trinitarianism also grounds the concepts of love and community. No other God-view can answer the questions of life with such meaning, insight, and profundity.

The Triune God

Trinitarianism affirms and asserts that there is one God (one divine essence) who exists as Father, Son, and Spirit. The Scripture declares, "*But Yahweh is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king*" (Jeremiah 10:10). He is the Creator and sustainer of the universe (Genesis 1:1-2). He is self-existent, "*In him was life...*" (John 1:4), and through Him all things have their being, "*All things came into being through him, and apart from him not one thing came into being that has come into being*"

³⁶ Trinitarianism must be implicitly affirmed in order to be saved. "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the universal Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled ... shall perish everlastingly. And the universal Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity..." St. Athanasias (ca. 500AD)

³⁷ This is a popular quote by C. S. Lewis available from many sources. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001).

³⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes are from *The Lexham English Bible*. Edited by Harris, W. Hall, III, Elliot Ritzema, Rick Brannan et al. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

(John 1:3). He is the Necessary Being, the ground of all being, existing “in” and “of” Himself— “a se” and “per se.” Jesus declared, “... *before Abraham was, I am*” (John 8:58; cf., Exodus 3:14). He is pure being and pure actuality— Jesus, the Son of God said, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, the one who is and the one who was and the one who is coming* [“*who is and who was and who is to come,*” ESV], *the All-Powerful*” (Revelation 1:8) and again, “*Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last*” (Revelation 1:17). The biblical record confirms that the one God is identified with the Father and Jesus (and Spirit) by equating the title “First and Last” to the Father and Son. “*Thus says Yahweh, the king of Israel, and its redeemer, Yahweh of hosts: “I am the first, and I am the last, and there is no god besides me”* (Isaiah 44:6). The names, “I am,” “the first and the last,” and the One “who is and who was and who is to come” demonstrate that biblically and philosophically God is Pure Act (*actus purus*). Norman Geisler writes, “Pure actuality ... is that which is (existence) with *no possibility to not exist* or to be anything other than it is—existence, pure and simple.”³⁹ Also as pure act, He has no capacity or potency (motion) but “moves” and gives being to all things— “*for in Him we ... move*” and “He ... gives to everyone life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:28, 25).

God is the highest good, being goodness Himself. He is perfect, simple (uncomposed), immutable and infinite. He is Spirit, light, and love (John 4:24; 1 John 1:5; 4:8) and the source of all love and community. He is unity-in-plurality, trinity in unity and unity in trinity. God is tri-personal and the ground of all volitional and self-conscious existence. He is personal, loving, gracious, and self-sufficient. “God exists in himself” Van Til writes, “as a triune self-consciously active being.”⁴⁰ The triune God of Scripture is by nature self-giving, active love and creates all things out of His essential goodness and grace.

God is both immanent (close) and transcendent (beyond). He is intimately involved and active in the world, yet He is incomprehensible and hallowed. The Son, the Word, God Himself, the second person of the Trinity became man and dwelt among His creation, “*the Word became flesh and took up residence among us*” (John 1:14). Therefore, He is “*God with*

³⁹ Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two: God, Creation*, 30.

⁴⁰ Cornelius Van Til and William Edgar, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003).

us” (Matthew 1:23) and yet, God above and beyond us. “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit’” (Isaiah 57:15, cf., 55:9, ESV).

He is sovereign and controls all things. “He is the planner . . . sustainer, and controller of all things.”⁴¹ “He himself is before all things, and in him all things are held together” (Colossians 1:17). God is the One “in whom all things have their source, support, and end.”⁴² All things owe their very being to Him. This is the biblical God. The God of basic theism, the God of the philosophers is a small slice of the God who exists as Father, Son, and Spirit.

THEISM

Theism is “belief in [one true] God and . . . its naturalistic form as a rational philosophy . . . is restricted to the one divine Essence.”⁴³ There are three major world religions that fall under the category of theism: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It should be stated that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity all designate the same metaphysical referent with the expression “God.” As rational or natural theology is concerned, all three assert belief in one true God, the Creator. Although the additional designations and descriptions of this God are radically different, there is still no other referent to the title “God” in theism. We may assert that metaphysically, they refer to the same Creator-God but theologically they differ. Kenneth Cragg explains,

[S]ince both Christians and Muslim faiths believe in One supreme sovereign Creator-God, they are obviously referring when they speak of Him, under whatever terms, to the same Being. To suppose otherwise would be confusing. It is important to keep in mind that though

⁴¹ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 158.

⁴² A. H. Strong cited by Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 159.

⁴³ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 162.

the apprehensions differ, their theme is the same. The differences, which undoubtedly exist, between the Muslim and the Christian understanding of God are far-reaching and must be patiently studied.⁴⁴

All three world religions fit within the category of theism; all believe in one Creator-God. Biblical Trinitarianism has been treated here separately because of its superiority as a philosophy and worldview.⁴⁵ Outside the revelation of Christ, basic theism cannot adequately answer the big questions of life. Basic theism is not enough for the salvation of the soul either (cf., John 17:3; Acts 4:12; James 2:19). Christianity is the religion of the one true and living God and it has tremendous implications for life that basic theism cannot apprehend. It is Christian theism that is absolutely necessary for a proper God-view and salvation.⁴⁶

Christianity is the legitimate fulfillment of the “seed” and “blessing” promises, which God made to Abraham,⁴⁷ and so, Judaism is put aside

⁴⁴ Cited by Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb in *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 16.

⁴⁵ On Trinitarianism’s philosophical richness Van Til writes, “The unity and the diversity in God are equally basic and mutually dependent upon one another. The importance of this doctrine for apologetics may be seen from the fact that the whole problem of philosophy may be summed up in the question of the relation of unity to diversity; the so-called problem of the one and the many receives a definite answer from the doctrine of the simplicity of God.” Cornelius Van Til and William Edgar, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003).

⁴⁶ Aquinas writes concerning the importance of divine revelation (Christianity) for the salvation of man. “Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation. Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man’s whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that, besides philosophical science built up by reason there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.1 a.1 resp.

⁴⁷ Cf. Galatians 3; Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18. See also Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1994), 334-380.

(as fulfilled), but not the Jewish people to which this revelation was given. Judaism's doctrine of God was the foundation upon which the New Testament revealed the doctrine of the Trinity. The religion of Judaism is abrogated, but not the sacred Scriptures that revealed it.⁴⁸ The substance has come in Christ, and therefore, the shadow is gone (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). This is the nature of progressive revelation. It is also very reasonable to suggest that the Old Testament, properly understood, anticipates the doctrine of the Trinity— one God in three persons. Justin Martyr (100 - 165 A.D.), in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, argues that the “Us” in Genesis 1:26 is actually a reference to Christ. He also argues that the references to “the Angel of the LORD (Yahweh)” in the Old Testament (distinct from the LORD (Yahweh) and yet called the LORD) are all reasons for the Jew, “Trypho,” to accept Christianity as the fulfillment of his own Jewish religion, which foreshadowed Trinitarianism.⁴⁹ Therefore, Judaism's theism is related to Christianity in a way that Islam is not.

Theologically, the theism of Islam is radically different from Christianity, which produces fundamentally different answers to the issues of M.I.M.O.D. Islam proclaims, “In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Say: He is God, The One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten;⁵⁰ And there is none Like unto Him” (Surah 112).⁵¹ The God of Islam is a strict monarchian, and therefore, cannot be “God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ” nor can he be love. The God of Islam can neither be the explanation for “the one and the many,” nor can he be the answer to the philosophical issues that are grounded in the concept of unity and diversity. In Islam, God could never have an “only begotten Son” (John 3:16), and therefore, be triune (Matthew 28:19). God is also wholly transcendent in Islam and could never be “God with us” (Matthew 1:23) or “our Father” (Matthew 6:9). It is apparent that there are

⁴⁸ The issue of continuity and discontinuity must be worked out through the application of a historical-grammatical hermeneutic. The relationship of the O.T. to the N.T. is one of the most important issues for right doctrine.

⁴⁹ Justin Martyr, “*Dialogue of Justin With Trypho, a Jew*” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers With Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), see Chapters 62, 126-129.

⁵⁰ This is clearly a “stab” at the Church's historic formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which was ultimately misunderstood by Mohammed.

⁵¹ Cf. *The Quran*, ed. Muhammad M. Pickthall (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library) and *The Quran*, ed. M. H. Shakir (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library).

basic similarities in the concept of God with Christianity and Judaism, and so, Islam is a theistic religion. But all resemblances stop there, for the God of Islam only shares a metaphysical likeness with the two other theistic religions. The God of Islam is a radical distortion of the God of Scripture and an inimical reaction to the biblical doctrine of the Trinity as in other man-made religions.

PANTHEISM

Pantheism, “pan” (all) “theism” ([is] God) is the worldview that identifies everything as part of a great impersonal and all pervasive force. It is the worldview held by Hindus, numerous Buddhists, and the New Age religions. It is also the worldview of Christian Science, Scientology, and Star Wars. Norm Geisler explains,

According to pantheism, God “is all in all.” God pervades all things, contains all things, subsumes all things, and is found within all things. Nothing exists apart from God, and all things are in some way identified with God. The world is God, and God is the world.⁵²

Beginning with Parmenides, many of the philosophers were pantheists. The ancient pre-Socratic mystics (e.g., Pythagoras, c. 570-495 B.C.) and more recently, Spinoza (c. 1632-1677) were all pantheistic. Pantheism reflects the parmenidian notion that all being is one; there is no change in the world—becomingness— all is being and all is one. Albert Einstein was also a pantheist, along with many other modern physicists. Einstein although he was Jewish believed in the pantheism of the philosopher Spinoza.⁵³

⁵² Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 580.

⁵³ God = Nature = Being = One. Van Til explains the theology and philosophy of Spinoza, “God is a substance which includes all possible attributes. There is no limited substance. There cannot be, for if limited then it must be limited by itself or by something else. If unlimited, there can be only one. So we are led to believe that God is the only substance. There is consequently only one category of Being. There are not two equal substances, nor can one substance produce another, so there is no more in God’s mind than is revealed in nature. God then is nature. . . . For Spinoza, God is nature, substance, the only category of being. It follows that God also has the attribute of extension.”

Adherence to pantheism is due, in part, to the lack of a doctrine of creation. Many modern physicists, following Einstein, want to force the “cause” or explanation of the universe into the universe itself. For them, the universe is all there is, and therefore, its *raison d’être* is in itself. As Carl Sagan famously states, “The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.”⁵⁴ But recent cosmological discoveries have made this position untenable and unfounded. In 1970 Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose “discovered that the operation of general relativity guarantees a singular boundary not just for matter and energy but also for space and time.”⁵⁵ In plain English, this means that matter, energy, space, and time all had a beginning a finite time ago by a transcendent causal agent. Since 1970, it has become increasingly more difficult, in view of the evidence, to squeeze the cause of all things into the universe. The cause of the universe, according to the theory of relativity, must transcend the four dimensions of this cosmos. Within pantheism, the universe is all there is, and there was no creation event—only endless cycles of reincarnation. The universe in this view has to pick itself up by its own proverbial bootstraps and cause its own being. Physicists today are still endeavoring to make the universe a metaphysical necessity. They argue that according to physical law (the laws of physics) the universe will inevitably come-to-be. All there is or will be is contained in the universe and governed by physical law. This was the point of Stephen Hawking’s latest book, *The Grand Design*.⁵⁶ In this pantheistic scheme, the laws of physics or nature equate to god. For the most part, any reference to god by modern physicists is but lip service and, ultimately, refers to the laws of nature in a Spinozian fashion.

POLYTHEISM

Polytheism, “poly” (many) “theism” (god[s]) is the worldview that believes in many personal finite gods. The ancient Greeks and Romans

Cornelius Van Til, “Spinoza” in *Evil and Theodicy, Unpublished Manuscripts of Cornelius Van Til*, Electronic ed. (Labels Army Company: New York, 1997).

⁵⁴ Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*

⁵⁵ Hugh Ross, *Beyond the Cosmos: What Recent Discoveries in Astrophysics Reveal About the Glory and Love of God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 28-29.

⁵⁶ Stephen W. Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010).

were very polytheistic. “Greco-Roman polytheism,” B. W. R. Pearson writes, “was a complex interplay of not only the pantheons of Greece and Rome, but also the many foreign gods and goddesses of other cultures.”⁵⁷ It has been suggested that polytheism is the result of the absence of critical thought among uncivilized cultures. It is seen as a failure to go above and beyond the local manifestations of divine operation. Polytheism is found among the savages and ancient tribal groups.⁵⁸

The Hindu religion is polytheistic, but it is very intricate and sophisticated as well. It is a very complex and difficult system to understand, especially for the Western mind. Hinduism is pluralistic and a great cosmic absorber of all religions. As such, Hinduism can be highly contradictory and irrational, embracing a “both/and” system of thought. Hinduism celebrates the existence of over 300 million gods.

The cultures that practice ancestor worship are also polytheistic. Mormonism, Scientology, the Unification Church, and UFO cults all fall within the pale of polytheism. Norm Geisler writes concerning polytheism and says that “unlike theism and deism, these gods are not viewed as being beyond the space-time world. Rather, they are in the world . . . unlike theism and deism, these gods are not creators of the universe but are its shapers and transformers.”⁵⁹

ATHEISM

Atheism, “a” (no) “theism” (god) is a prominent view in the West. It undergirds science education and its outworking leads to naturalism. Naturalism is the belief that there are no supernatural entities, no such being as God, or nothing like God at all. Nothing like God exists outside of nature; only nature and its laws exist. “Naturalism,” Dan Story writes, “is clearly the guiding light, the presupposition, underlying science, education, social structures, modern psychology, and just about every other field of

⁵⁷ B. W. R. Pearson, “Polytheism, Greco-Roman,” ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: a Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 815.

⁵⁸ See Francis J. Hall, *Theological Outlines: The Doctrine of God*, vol. 1 (Milwaukee, WI: The Young Churchman Co., 1905), 80-83.

⁵⁹ Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 217.

human endeavor.”⁶⁰ The fact that naturalistic science has control in the West is seen in the surprising admission of Richard Lewontin. He writes,

We [Naturalists] take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a divine foot in the door.⁶¹

This statement is the most transparent and forthcoming admission of any atheist in writing. It should be noted that the “divine foot” is the Christian God. It is the God of the Bible that is denied and hated by atheists. This truth is most apparent in the diatribes of the popular author and atheist Richard Dawkins. Mr. Dawkins’ atheism can be most accurately described as a kind of inverted fundamentalism. His atheism is directed at the God of the Bible.

⁶⁰ Story, *Christianity on the Offense*, 122.

⁶¹ Richard Lewontin, review of *The Demon Haunted World*, by Carl Sagan, *The New York Review of Books* (January 9, 1997), 28-31.

CHAPTER THREE

Can God Be Known?

Can you find out the essence of God, or can you find out the ultimate limits of Shaddai? It is higher than the heaven; what can you do? It is deeper than Sheol; what can you know?

– Job, *The Book of Job*

Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how incomprehensible are his ways.

– Apostle Paul, *The Letter to the Romans*

“God,” “El,” “Elohim,” “Theos,” “Dios,” “Dieu,” “Deus,” “Gott,” “Gud,” and “Tanri” are all ways of referring to “the greatest conceivable being”⁶² in the various languages of the East and the West. The fact that no known culture is without a linguistic expression for this “Being” is very telling, both theologically and anthropologically. In fact, no known culture is without the concept of “the greatest conceivable being,” who is also understood as the Creator-God. Every known culture, ancient or modern, has a mode of expression to venerate this “Being,” no matter how crude or primitive the method. Man as religious (*homo religiosus*) is a confirmation

⁶² Anselm, *Proslogion*. “The being than which no greater can be thought.” (aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit). See also Hebrews 6:13, ουδενος... μειζονος (oudenos... meizonos) “no one... greater.” It is clear that the Scripture agrees with this basic description of God.

of the veiled knowledge of the Creator-God within mankind. Plutarch confirms this fact and writes,

If you go round the world you may find cities without walls, or literature, or kings, or houses, or wealth, or money, without gymnasia or theaters. But no one ever saw a city without temples and gods, one which does not have recourse to prayers or oaths or oracles, which does not offer sacrifice to obtain blessings, or celebrate rites to avert evil.⁶³

Cicero further illustrates, “There is no people, so wild and savage as not to have believed in a God, even if they have been unacquainted with His nature. . . . It is necessary to believe that there are gods, because we have an implanted or rather innate knowledge of them.”⁶⁴ The universality of the concept of God is an amazing phenomenon within human history. But it is one thing to have a linguistic and phonological referent to this “greatest conceivable being” in the expression “God,” and it is wholly another to begin to define Him. Charles Ryrie elaborates,

If a definition consists of “a word or phrase expressing the essential nature of a person or thing,” then God cannot be defined, for no word or even phrase could express His essential nature. No one could put together such a definition of God. But if the definition were descriptive, then it is possible to define God, though not exhaustively.⁶⁵

A BASIC DEFINITION

The ancient philosophers, according to the light of reason (Romans 1:19-20), made an attempt to define God. The fact that humans can conceive of, and nominally define God is certainly grounded in their constitution. For man is created in the image and likeness of God. The fact

⁶³ Cited by Bernard Boedder, *Natural Theology* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1891, 1915). 63.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁵ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 39.

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that mankind knows of God as an innate truth enables him to speak basic truths concerning God.

Plato defined God as “Eternal Mind, [and] the cause of all good in creation.”⁶⁶ This definition of God is good, fair, and accurate. Philip Melanchthon (Martin Luther’s successor, circa 1559) commented that Plato’s definition of God was “true, erudite, and well-founded” even though it needed to be supplemented with Biblical statements.⁶⁷ Aristotle defined God as “the first ground of all being,”⁶⁸ the divine spirit, unmoved and mover of all things.⁶⁹ Aristotle spoke of God as the “First Cause” (*prima causa*) and the “First Mover” (*primum movens*) of all things.⁷⁰ The German philosopher Hegel defined God as “the absolute Spirit; the pure, essential Being that makes himself object to himself; absolute holiness; absolute power, wisdom, goodness, justice.”⁷¹

With the illumination of biblical truth, theologian A. H. Strong defines God as “an eternal, uncaused, independent, necessary Being, that hath active power, life, wisdom, goodness, and whatsoever other supposable excellency, in the highest perfection, in and of itself.”⁷² The Westminster Divines defined God as “a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”⁷³ John Miley suggests that a definition of God is not complete without reference to personality and personal attributes. He defines God as “an eternal

⁶⁶ My translation of the Latin “deus est mens aeterna (et) causa boni in natura.” ‘Natura’ is usually translated as nature. To translate it as “creation” is within its lexical scope (i.e. “the world, the universe”). Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.

⁶⁷ Bernhard Punjer. *History of the Christian Philosophy of Religion*. Trans. by W. Hastie (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887), 135.

⁶⁸ Cited in John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1 (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 59.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. XI. ch. Vii and *Physics*, VIII. vi. Gk. “Unmoved Mover,” οὐ κινουµενον κινει (ou kinoumenon kinei). Motion is any kind of change, whether it is from one locale to another or the motion of potency to act: the philosophical notion of being and becoming.

⁷⁰ See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 17.

⁷¹ Cited in Miley, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1, 59.

⁷² Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 52.

⁷³ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs, 3rd edition*. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), Q.4.

personal Being, of absolute knowledge, power, and goodness.”⁷⁴ These definitions, though true and right, only touch the surface of the Divine essence, and should be thought of as analogical, not univocal descriptions of God. It was the early Church Father Tertullian (160-220 A.D.) who said, “So far as a human being can form a definition of God, I adduce one which the conscience of all men will also acknowledge, that God is the great Supreme, existing in eternity, unbegotten, unmade, without beginning, without end.”⁷⁵

Now that the glottally stopped monosyllabic expression, “God” has been impregnated with meaning with its reference to “the greatest conceivable being,” we will now proceed to answer the question as to whether God can be known and to what extent.

APPREHENDING GOD

Human beings can only have a basic apprehension of the nature of God. We cannot comprehend His ways nor can we understand His thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). Since the sun is too bright to look upon directly, its presence and form are only known through its effects. We do not have the ability to see or touch the sun *as it is* (in its *essence*), we can only know of it through its own radiated light. In like manner, God can only be known, in part by man, through revelation but man cannot comprehend Him in His essence (*as He is*). God is blinding brilliant incomprehensible light (gamma to radio, if you will) but He is also the “visible” light by which things are illuminated and perceived, even Himself.⁷⁶

God is light, and therefore, knowable. But He can never be fully known by any but Himself (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). Finite man can scarcely presume to comprehend the absolute brightness and immensity of the God

⁷⁴ Miley, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1, 60.

⁷⁵ Tertullian, “*The Five Books Against Marcion*,” trans. Peter Holmes In, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 273.

⁷⁶ Light is not just “visible light” that can be seen by the human eye. The full light (electromagnetic) spectrum (gamma to ultraviolet [visible] and infrared to terahertz to microwave to radio) cannot be seen by man. Light is only partially “apprehended” by man without aid. As the full light spectrum can never be seen by the eye, so the fullness of God can never be known by man. “God is light” (1 John 1:5).

who enlightens all reality. Clement of Alexandria expressed this fact when he spoke of “the impossibility of expressing God” and declared, “what is divine is unutterable by human power.”⁷⁷ This was also what Wittgenstein was getting at when, at the end of *Tractatus*, he said, that what underlies how we say things cannot itself be said.⁷⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus states that “it is difficult to conceive of God, but to define Him in words is an impossibility.”⁷⁹ Clement and Gregory’s words are not an admission of Christian agnosticism, but rather a reminder that God is infinitely beyond our understanding. Our knowledge of God “is limited [and] bounded by our humanity.”⁸⁰ Apart from the willful condescension of God, mankind would be left to grope in darkness and despair. But God has revealed Himself and because of this, we can know Him. We can have a genuine, but incomplete knowledge of God (cf. Romans 11:33). This is because He has condescended to reveal Himself. Hence, while we cannot fully comprehend God we can know Him (Galatians 4:8-9; Ephesians 1:17).

LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD

Human language cannot escape the fact that it is subject to space-time limitations. Our ability to communicate and predicate metaphysical truth is limited by all the impediments of humanity. Our linguistic expressions are “limited and bounded.” In a word, language is “finite” and—*finitum non capax infiniti*, “the finite is not capable of the infinite.”⁸¹ The fundamental question is, how can human language represent the infinite, perfect, and incomprehensible God? When we speak of God, how does our language relate to His reality?

⁷⁷ Clement of Alexandria, “*The Stromata, or Miscellanies*,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 463.

⁷⁸ This statement is only illustrative.

⁷⁹ Donald G. Bloesch, *God, the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 31.

⁸⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, electronic ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), ch. 10

⁸¹ On this phrase and its relationship to the incarnation of Christ, see Chapter 10 in Frank O’Hara, *Jesus Christ after Two Thousand Years: The Definitive Interpretation of His Personality*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 56

Language and communication are gifts of God to mankind, and indeed, an aspect of the image of God. It is through language that we can speak of God and God can speak to us. Language is God's avenue of revelation concerning Himself.⁸² The inscripturated word of God communicates divine truth through a finite medium, and is sufficient for the impartation of life, which comes from the knowledge of God (1 Peter 1:23-25). Language, therefore, has the capacity to communicate truth about God. But how does language communicate theological truth?

In the act of communication and predication, there are three possible ways in which language can be used of God: (1) univocal, (2) equivocal, and (3) analogical. Univocal means that the terms predicated (or communicated) are applied in exactly the same manner, whether referring to God or man. Equivocation is the use of a term in an entirely different way—to equivocate. Analogical means that terms can apply to God and created things in a similar way— analogically. To illustrate, we can say that “God is good” and “Scott is good.” The matter at hand is how is the word “good” used (applied) in these two sentences. Does it mean (1) the same thing, (2) something totally different, or (3) there is a similar or analogical way in which a man is good and God is good.

Our language about God cannot be univocal because God is infinite and we are not exactly like Him. It cannot be equivocal because that would communicate nothing and would lead to agnosticism. Therefore, in reference to God our language is analogical⁸³ there is a likeness. Analogical predication is the only means of communicating truth about God. There is a similarity (analogy) between infinite and finite goodness within the concept of goodness itself. The application is analogical because the predication of finite goodness cannot fully describe or is “not capable” of an infinite object. It cannot fully communicate its perfect, infinite referent—the *Infinite-Eternal God* but it can communicate “true” truth. Univocal predication is inadequate due to the finite nature of created intelligences

⁸² For a great treatment on the philosophy of language see Vern Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language— A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

⁸³ This should not be confused with analogical interpretation of Scripture, which is not an appropriate method. All Scripture should be interpreted consistently (including prophecy) with the historical, grammatical, literal, normal method. See Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation*, Kindle Edition and Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishers, 1991).

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and their language. There cannot be a one-to-one correspondence between the finite and the infinite therefore it is not univocal. Aquinas explains,

That nothing can be predicated univocally of God.... For an effect which does not receive the same form specifically as that whereby the agent acts, cannot receive in a univocal sense the name derived from that form: for the sun and the heat generated from the sun are not called hot univocally.⁸⁴

This is to say that in a causal relationship, as with man and God— for goodness to be univocally predicated— man would have had to receive the identical kind of goodness that God possesses.

Equivocation is an unproductive and ambiguous form of communication. It continually happens within the creation/evolution debate by evolutionists. Most often, evidence is presented for adaptation (called micro-evolution or just “evolution”) and then the terms are equivocated, and what was once evidence for micro-evolution (adaption) becomes evidence for macro-evolution (Darwinism). The equivocation happens in mid-sentence, and evidence for Darwinian evolution⁸⁵ is slipped in under

⁸⁴ Saint Thomas Aquinas and Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 76.

⁸⁵ Within a species, a morphological change takes place due to a “favorable” genetic mutation, which allows an organism to adapt and change according to its environmental pressures. This kind of change takes place through natural and artificial selection. This is called evolution or adaptation. For example, viruses “evolve” and become immune to antibiotics and continue to survive and thrive. This happens as a result of the loss in genetic information. One of the most popular examples is malaria in humans. Some groups of people in Africa are immune to malaria due to a genetic mutation. Non-immune babies tragically die if they catch malaria and do not live to have children. The only problem is that while this looks “favorable,” if two surviving, immune people have children, their children will have sickle cell. This is the genetic equivalent of cutting off your foot and saying that you are immune to ingrown toenails. This is a loss of information, and this is the only thing that happens in evolution. The genome will never have information added due to a mutation. Evolution is never upward; it is only downward. Adam and Eve already had the genetic information to account for the diversity in the human race that is apparent now. Humans do not, and, are not getting better. There is a continually growing genetic load (i.e., mutations) accumulating in the human genome. More diseases and more problems are inevitable (unless we “fix” genetic mutations through intelligent input) because adaptation is a downward process. See Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

the guise of adaptation. The vacillation between terms (with sameness of name for two fundamentally different principles) happens often in popular communication and propaganda. Aquinas explains, “Where there is pure equivocation, we observe no likeness of things, but merely sameness of name.”⁸⁶ The likeness of name with the antithesis of nature (pure equivocation) is the wellspring of skepticism and agnosticism.

The only way that God can be spoken of properly using finite language is analogically. Humans are finite effects of an Infinite Cause. Therefore, analogy is the only way we can accurately describe the “*effects*” relationship to the Cause. Analogy is the only way that humans can speak meaningfully about God without fear of contradiction or verbal idolatry. Norman Geisler describes this principle of analogy,

The principle of analogy states that an effect must be similar to its cause. Like produces like. An effect cannot be totally different from its cause. An act (or actor) communicates actuality. It affirms that the Cause of all being (God) must be like the beings he causes. It denies that God can be totally different (equivocal) from his effects, for the Being that causes all other being cannot bring into being something that does not have being like he is. Being causes being. Likewise, analogy affirms that God cannot be totally the same as his effects, for in this case they would be identical to God. But the created cannot be identical to the uncreated, nor the finite to the Infinite. Hence, God the Creator of all being must be similar to the creatures he has made.⁸⁷

Analogical predication has been criticized as being reducible to pure equivocation, and therefore, leading to skepticism. In order to save the principle of analogy from skepticism, we can conceive of the *concepts* as univocal. Analogy is grounded in univocal concepts. It is the concepts that are univocal and not the predications. There is the univocal concept of goodness, but goodness can only be applied to God and man in an analogical way. God is perfect goodness and the ground of goodness. The

⁸⁶ Aquinas, vol. 1, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 78.

⁸⁷ Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 17.

elect angels are good, being fully actualized finite intelligences. A man is good but not univocally (exactly the same) as an angel, and certainly not like the perfect goodness of God. God is perfect, absolute, infinite, unchanging goodness. Therefore, the univocality is in the concept and the analogy is in the application. In the application of goodness, this can be seen clearly in the phrases, “God is good,” “Mal is a good man,” “Jasper is a good dog,” and “my Ford is a good truck.” The concept of goodness is the same, but the application is different for God, a man, a dog, and a car. Therefore, analogical predication is not reducible to pure equivocation and is the only way that the finite can discuss the Infinite.

FAITH AND REASON

God has disclosed Himself through two avenues— one natural and the other supernatural. The natural avenue is called general revelation, (see *Table 1*) which is the natural knowledge (*cognitio naturalis*) of God or the knowledge of God through the light of reason. The supernatural avenue is called special revelation, which is the supernatural knowledge (*cognitio supernaturalis*) of God through divine revelation. Natural knowledge can know “*that God is*,” and supernatural knowledge can know “*who God is*.” These two avenues of divine truth are used to formulate what can be called rational theology (the knowledge of God by *reason*) and relational theology (the knowledge of God by *faith*).⁸⁸

The truth revealed through special revelation is the knowledge upon which a relationship with God can be restored and established. General revelation reveals the basic truth of God’s existence, exaltation, and essential attributes (Romans 1:19-20; Psalm 19:1-6). The things known of God through both avenues are called “mixed articles” (*articuli mixti*). This is because they overlap in their revealed truth. Both creation and Scripture declare the existence and essential attributes of God. Concerning this truth Aquinas writes,

⁸⁸ The “harmony between faith and reason according to which our knowledge of God stemming from the natural light of human reason is supplemented and enhanced by a supernatural revelation that is itself not contrary to reason. Thus reason illuminated by faith, and faith clarified by reason, are in no conflict but are even mutually supportive.” “*Realism*” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 2005), 501.

Now in those things which we hold about God there is truth in two ways. For certain things that are true about God wholly surpass the capability of human reason, for instance that God is three and one: while there are certain things to which even natural reason can attain, for instance that God is, that God is one, and others like these, which even the philosophers proved demonstratively of God, being guided by the light of natural reason.⁸⁹

This “truth in two ways” is the knowledge of God through general and special revelation. The truth “that God is” and “that God is one” is available through both faith and reason. The fact that God is sovereign is also established through both means, along with many other evident truths. Faith and reason are allies in the disclosure of divine truth.

Faith and reason are not opposed to each other but form a perfect union, a happy marriage. “There is also a place for the authority of reason: the grace of God does not replace reason but fulfills it, and reason serves faith in the same way that our natural inclination of will serves love.”⁹⁰ Faith and reason should complement and inform the other. Nature is as much of an avenue of truth as faith. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes,

The book of nature is as much God’s book as is the Book of revelation. The universe is His work and therefore must attest His Being, and, as far as it can advance, unfold His ways. The voice of nature and the voice of revelation proceeding from the same source must harmonize; nor can either be slighted with impunity. It is not contended that the book of nature is comparable in extent, exactness, or elucidation, with the Book of revelation.⁹¹

As history has drawn out, the “book of nature” has been helpful in understanding the “book of revelation” and vice versa. Both are prone to error, not because of the source, but because of the interpreter. Man can distort both “books” if he is not humble before the Spirit of God to

⁸⁹ Aquinas, vol. 1, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4-5.

⁹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation.*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc. 1989). 3.

⁹¹ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 140.

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lead him into all truth.⁹² In this, the illumination ministry of the Spirit is essential. Reason should not circumvent faith, and faith should not ignore the findings of reason. It should be cautioned though, that the volitional aspect of man's mind has been affected through sin and the motivation of the heart is evil. The fact that the natural mind can ascertain a certain degree of Divine knowledge is well attested to by Scripture. The Apostle Paul, in the epistle to the church in Rome, demonstrated very clearly that the human race, though knowing of God, has suppressed and rejected that knowledge.⁹³

<i>General Revelation</i>			
<i>Creation</i>	<i>Moral Law</i>	<i>Providence</i>	<i>Inward Sense of God</i> <i>sensus divinitatis</i>
Psalm 19:1-6 Romans 1:18-20	Romans 2:12-16	Acts 14:17; 17:26-27	Acts 17:22-31

(Table 1)

⁹² John 16:13

⁹³ Romans 1-2

CHAPTER FOUR

The ‘Doxa’ and ‘Soteric’ Knowledge of God

The start of wisdom is fear of Yahweh, and knowledge of the Holy One, insight.

– Solomon, *Proverbs*

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands. Every day they pour forth speech, and every night they tell knowledge.

– King David, *Psalms*

The Creator has revealed Himself and has given to creatures the knowledge of God. “That God is” is revealed by means of **creation** (what is made), and “who God is” is revealed in Scripture (what is written). Creation communicates the “*doxa knowledge*” of God (the knowledge of the Glory of God). Scripture communicates the “*soteric knowledge*” of God (the knowledge of the salvation of the Lord).^(see Table 2) The goal of the doxa knowledge of God is the demonstration of the glory, goodness, and greatness of God. The doxa knowledge of God is contained in Creation (“the cosmos without” [physical law]) and in **conscience** (“the constitution within” [moral law]). The goal of the soteric knowledge of God is the salvation of the Elect.⁹⁴ The soteric knowledge of God can only be communicated and applied by the Holy Spirit.

⁹⁴ “Elect” or “chosen” cf. Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:1-2. “Knowledge” cf. John 10:14; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:9; 1 John 2:13-14.

Two Aspects of the Knowledge of God

[*'doxa'* means 'Glory' - *'soteric'* means 'Salvation']

	Doxological "doxa" Knowledge	Soteriological "soteric" Knowledge
God	"That He is"	"Who He is"
Means	Creation	Scripture
Method	General Revelation	Special Revelation
Mode	Cognitio Naturalis	Cognitio Supernaturalis
Manner	Rational Theology	Relational Theology
State in Sin	Confused	Lost
State in Christ	Clear	Restored

(Table 2)

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN CREATION - GOD'S GLORY

The glory, goodness, and greatness of God are revealed in what He has made. The Psalmist writes of God's glory, "*The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands. Every day they pour forth speech, and every night they tell knowledge*" (Psalm 19:1-3). In this passage there are three things conveyed. (1) The **creation** handiwork, (2) the **communication** of inaudible speech, and (3) the **content** of knowledge told, which are all poetic expressions of the creation's disclosure of "the Glory of God." Creation, especially the splendor of space, communicates the glory of God in a way that baffles the human mind. Unlike any other generation in history, this generation has access to the wonders of the universe through modern telescopes. The images of space captured through the Hubble Telescope⁹⁵ are just awe-inspiring. The brilliant colors, the raw display of power, and the sheer size of it all generate nothing less than awe, adoration, and amazement in the human heart. Sublime may be the only other word to describe the true nature of it all. Truly, all the peoples see his glory, "*The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory*" (Psalm 97:6). The Psalmist also exclaims, "*On the splendor of the glory of your majesty, and*

⁹⁵ For images of creation, see <http://hubblesite.org/gallery>

on your wonderful deeds, I will meditate” (Psalm 145:5). Worship is truly enriched and deepened by a contemplation and meditation on the heavens.

O’ Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made.
I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.⁹⁶

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN CREATION - GOD’S GOODNESS

The goodness of God is demonstrated and proclaimed throughout the created order. The Apostle Paul declared to the Lycaonians,⁹⁷ “*And yet he (God) did not leave himself without witness by doing good, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying you with food and your hearts with gladness*” (Acts 14:17 cf. Matthew 5:44-45). The goodness of God is seen in (1) the **seasons of harvest** and (2) the **satisfaction of heart**. The fact that existence is enjoyable and good is a testimony to the goodness of God. In spite of the evil and suffering that is experienced, existence is still pleasant and life is worth living. “Being”⁹⁸ is good and creation is declared to be good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).⁹⁹ On creation day

⁹⁶ “*How Great Thou Art*” Carl Gustav Boberg (1859–1940).

⁹⁷ The setting of this statement is in the city of Lystra in the context of a divine miracle and the preaching of the Gospel. There was a misidentification of Paul and Barnabas by the people for the gods Hermes (the chief messenger) and Zeus (the main god). The people said, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.” Paul immediately turns the people’s attention to the goodness of God as seen in the nature of creation and through common grace.

⁹⁸ See chapter 5

⁹⁹ This author is inclined to consider the statement, “Then God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good” (NKJV) to be an ontological statement. As an ontological statement, it is not a limited reference to creation before the Fall, where after the Fall the creation is no longer considered good. The seasons, for example, are a result of creation day 4 and the goodness of what was instituted on that day is fully intact. As for evil and sin, evil is a privation of what should be and can only exist in a good substance. Sin is the misdirection or misuse of a good thing (substance) in missing its intended purpose—“to miss the mark” (Gk. hamartanō). The intimacy of a husband and wife is not an evil, but the intimacy of an unmarried man and woman is an evil. The good thing (intimacy) is not used or directed toward its created purpose. In this sense, sin is teleological. Furthermore, evil is like rot in a tree or rust in a nail. Nothing itself is evil; evil is not a thing or a substance. It is existence or being itself

four God created the “seasons” and the Apostle Paul proclaimed that this act was ultimately a display of God’s goodness. “*Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years”* (Genesis 1:14, NKJV). The sun, moon, and stars are markers of the seasons and the 23^{1/2}-degree tilt of the earth produces them. We can suggest that the sun, moon, and stars were created,¹⁰⁰ in part, to display that “God is good” as well as great (cf. Psalm 25:8; Nahum 1:7; Psalm 19:1). What a display! What care, concern, and love God must have for mankind. This is referred to as the common grace of God given to all mankind. This common grace is grounded in the goodness of God.¹⁰¹ God “*causes his sun to rise on the*

that is good and not the mere absence of sin or a privation. In this sense, everything that God created is still good. Goodness is a universal and creation by virtue of its being is good. It is the misuse of creation or the privation of the created purpose that is the “sin” or evil—as in the lack of sight in an eye that is created to see, when what should be there is not there that is the evil.

¹⁰⁰ The 100-billion-trillion stars that exist are a part of the “anthropic principle,” which scientists have discovered. If it were not for the existence of this vast number of stars, biological life could not exist nor would the earth exist but only the light elements of hydrogen and helium.

¹⁰¹ The ground of common grace is the atonement of Christ. “*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). The temporal wrath of God toward the world was assuaged in the cross of Christ. The fact that man is not presently consumed by the holiness and righteousness of God is established by the space-time work of the cross. The design of the atonement was to save the Elect and ground the temporal goodness of God expressed toward man under the penalty of sin. God can be long-suffering toward the sinner in common grace because of the cross (cf. Acts 14:17; Acts 17:30; Romans 2:4). In this scheme, the design of the atonement would be to save the Elect certainly, efficaciously, and eternally as their vicarious substitute but as 1 John 2:2 states, the cross was also a propitiatory sacrifice toward the world (mankind) and assuaged the wrath of God temporally for the unbeliever and world system. I would call this view (my view) a moderate or soft 5-point Calvinism or a traditional (with the addition of a most important half point) 4½-point Dispensational Calvinism (and Thomism). This is the only reasonable position in light of divine simplicity, aseity, immutability, and perfection. The (fore)knowledge of God alone demands a “design” for the atonement that actually saves the foreknown, predestined believer. It cannot just render all men “savable” (potentially) without saving any actually. The cross is efficient for the elect and its value is infinite. The application of the atonement to the elect through the Spirit (by faith) is a necessary aspect of the coherent work of the triune God in salvation. Infralapsarianism: The Divine decrees (1) Create all, (2) Permit the Fall, (3) Elect some [positive predestination] and pass by others [no predestination] (4) Provide salvation only for the elect (5) Apply salvation through faith to the elect.

evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). Life is fundamentally good and worth living even for an unbeliever. All people are recipients of the goodness of God. “Yahweh is good to all, and his mercies are over all his works” (Psalm 145:9).

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN CREATION - GOD’S GREATNESS

The greatness of God is revealed through the nature of the things that have been made. “For from the creation of the world, his invisible attributes, both his eternal power and deity, are discerned clearly, being understood in the things created, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). The greatness of God displayed in creation, i.e., “his invisible attributes” are (1) His *dynamic power* and (2) His *divine personhood*.

Dynamic Power

The **dynamic power** of God is revealed by the nature of three-dimensional (3-D) space.¹⁰² The fabric of empty space is emblazoned with an immense amount of power, which serves to proclaim the incomprehensible power of the Creator. There is more pure power in just one cubic centimeter of empty space than the whole human race could ever consume, even in a hundred billion years at modern consumption rates. In the vacuum of empty space,¹⁰³ at the quantum level, the unimaginable power of God is evinced. Ultimately, this power keeps the atom from collapsing in on itself at absolute zero, and likewise, powers the expansion of the universe. It is also called “dark energy.” About 72% of the universe is comprised of dark

¹⁰² String theory suggests that there are at least 6 more spatial dimensions to the physical universe, which “curled” up upon themselves to the size of 10^{-35} meters (Plank length) prior to 10^{-43} seconds (Plank time) after creation. It is also possible that the fall of man “severed” access to these extra dimensions.

¹⁰³ This “quantum nothingness” is the supposed “nothing” that fluctuated and gave rise to the “something.” This nothingness is supposedly unstable and would inevitably give birth to the “something”—the Universe. This is a case of defining the “something” as “nothing” and claiming that the “nothing” caused the “something.” The irrationality that has been propagated as science in our day is at an all time high. Lawrence Krauss writes, “The answer to the ancient question, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ would be that ‘nothing’ is unstable” Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing* (p. 159).

energy. The power contained in just one cubic centimeter of empty space is equivalent to one hundred billion stars (all the stars in the Milky Way galaxy) burning for one million years. This is the unfathomable power of the vacuum— 10^{90} joules.¹⁰⁴

The nature of matter also exhibits the enormity and immensity of God's power. Since $E=MC^2$, matter can be converted to energy at an inconceivable exchange rate. Matter converts to pure energy at "M times C^2 ," which is "M" times 186,282 squared. "C" equals the speed of light. To "square" is to multiply the number 186,282 by itself. There are not enough digits on a typical calculator display to square "C" and get the numeric answer. This conversion simply boggles the mind, even in the outworking of the mathematical equations. To count numerically to the solution of C^2 would take someone approximately 1,100 years. This is unimaginably large when considering the real kinetic energy of an atomic bomb. An atomic bomb requires just 15 kilograms of uranium-235 to achieve nuclear fission and explode. This power was tragically displayed in World War II with the bombing of two Japanese cities.

Consequently, the atom bomb is extremely inefficient in the mass to energy conversion. The conversion rate in the mechanism of a nuclear bomb is far less efficient than what takes place in the sun. The sun converts approximately 500k tons of hydrogen into 495k tons of helium every second through nuclear fusion. The "mass loss" of 5,000 tons of hydrogen is converted into pure energy. Only 5,000 tons of hydrogen fuels the sun's immense energy output. In one second, the sun produces more energy than has been used by humans in the history of the world. Consider if all of the normal matter in the known universe was converted back into pure energy as it was at the moment of creation. Consider the power exerted in creation when God said, "star" and a star was made (Psalm 33:6, 9). Consider that He did this for the 100 billion trillion stars in the known universe. The number of stars in the visible universe is roughly equivalent to the total number of the grains of sand on every beach upon the planet earth. Now,

¹⁰⁴ 1Joule/sec = 1 Watt. For an interesting scientific account, watch the online lecture by Dr. Tom Valone, Zero-Point Energy Extraction from the Quantum Vacuum. <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5738531568036565057>(accessed July 12, 2012). Cf., Any resource concerning Dark Energy or the Higgs Boson. The mass density of empty space is 10^{95} grams per centimeter cubed (g/cm^3). The mass density of water is $1 g/cm^3$. The difference in energy between the zero-point field and water is almost unimaginable!

consider that only 4% of the mass/energy in the universe is ordinary, visible matter called baryonic matter. This is the “normal” matter of the universe, matter that is made up of three quarks¹⁰⁵ and interacts with light. Consider dark matter (non-visible, non-baryonic matter) and the energy “tied up” in it. About 23% of the universe is dark matter. Dark matter is the scaffolding upon which the galaxies are hung. Some have suggested that it is matter and/or high-energy photons in a parallel dimension.¹⁰⁶ The power exhibited in creation is only a finite display of the infinitely powerful God. Matter/energy, dark energy, and dark matter although unimaginable in power are still nothing compared to God’s dynamic and infinite power. The only acceptable description of this is “greatness,” and in the superlative— God’s great power is the greatest!

The Divine Person

God’s **divine person** is evident in many ways through the testimony of creation. The *personhood* and *tri-unity* of God are seen “from what has been made” (Romans 1:20, NIV84). Our very being and nature confirm the fact that God is personal. Human beings are personal beings. Personhood is the principal component of what it means to be human. The Apostle Paul on Mars Hill proclaims, “*For we also are his offspring. Therefore, because we are offspring of God, we ought not to think the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought*” (Acts 17:28–29).¹⁰⁷ Personality is at the core of what makes us relational beings,

¹⁰⁵ A proton is made up of three quarks: two up quarks and one down quark. A neutron is, likewise, composed of three quarks: two down quarks and one up quark. It is interesting that the matter we are made of is 3 in 1. Could the fundamental building blocks of matter be telling us something about the issue of “unity in diversity” or the question of “the one and the many?” Could it be an insight into ultimate reality? Is it the Christian view of ultimate reality that actually breaks forth from the discoveries of modern science?

¹⁰⁶ See Michio Kaku, *Parallel Worlds: A Journey Through Creation, Higher Dimensions, and the Future of the Cosmos* (New York: Doubleday, 2004) and C. DeSalvo, *GOD? Reviews of All Major Arguments And Evidence For And Against God* (Pithy Publishing Inc., Kindle Edition, 2008)

¹⁰⁷ The pre-evangelistic message of natural theology is extremely relevant today. Natural theology has become increasingly more important for the post-Christian West. William Larkin writes, “Paul’s speech becomes a model for how to witness to the educated post-Christian mind, even as it spoke to Theophilus and his fellow seekers

and it suggests something about our originating causal Agent. According to the *Analogy of Being* (analogia entis),¹⁰⁸ our source (God) must also be personal because He is the cause and ground of our personhood. Likewise, God must be pure being because He is the cause and ground of all being,¹⁰⁹ for “whatever perfection exists in an effect must be found in the effective cause.”¹¹⁰ This is also the *Law of Proportionate Causality*,¹¹¹ which states that whatever is in an effect must also be in its cause. Edward Feser elaborates the principle of proportionate causality: “a cause cannot give to its effect what it does not have itself, whether formally, eminently, or

with their first-century pre-Christian minds.” William J. Larkin, Jr., vol. 5, Acts: *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), Acts 17:16-34.

¹⁰⁸ Analogy of Being – “the analogy of being, the assumption of an analogia, or likeness, between finite and infinite being.” Richard Muller. *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (p. 32). Kindle Edition.

Norman Geisler notes, “He [Aquinas] argued for both unity and diversity within being itself ... being for Aquinas was composed of actuality and potentiality. There can be different kinds of beings, depending on their potentiality. Some beings (like men) have the potential for being rational; others (like tomatoes) do not. These different potentials are real. For example, there are real differences among the potentials of an acorn, a monkey, and an Albert Einstein. Potentials make a difference, argued Aquinas, in the kind of thing a being is.” Norman L. Geisler, Paul D. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 172.

¹⁰⁹ In reference to the nature of being, Norman Geisler suggests that the only way to account for the problem of the “one and the many” (unity and diversity) and Parmenidean monism (pantheism) is the doctrine of the Analogy of Being. Without it there is only skepticism. He says concerning “analogia entis,” “the analogy between creature and Creator, based on causality, is secured only because God is the principal, intrinsic, essential, efficient Cause of the being and perfections of the world. In any other kind of causal relationship an analogical similarity would not necessarily follow, but in an analogy of being similarity must follow, for Being communicates only being, and perfections or kinds of being do not arise from an imperfect being. Existence produces only after its kind, namely, other existences.” Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002), 152-53.

¹¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.4.2.

¹¹¹ Norman Geisler argues that the “analogy of being” is based in intrinsic causality, efficient causality, and essential causality and that effects do not resemble their instrumental causes, but their principle causes. See Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*.

virtually.”¹¹² Therefore, if personhood exists in the effect, it cannot be missing from the cause.

This principle also informs us concerning the origination of life. The origin of life cannot be satisfactorily explained by natural causes because the principle of life is missing from the supposed evolutionary cause. Life begets life; living matter cannot come from that which is non-living. Also, the existence of (self) conscious life and the mind further complicates the problem of a supposed lifeless, mindless “cause” of the universe.¹¹³ This principle is also true of *Information Theory* with the existence of information and design at the core of life. Richard Dawkins confirms, “What lies at the heart of every living thing ... is information ... instructions.”¹¹⁴ Information and design is everywhere— from the initial conditions and fine-tuning of the expansion rate of the Big Bang to the nature and interactions of water molecules— the universe loudly and cogently reveals the existence of its Designer. As the British astrophysicist Paul Davies writes, “There is for me powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all... It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature’s numbers to make the Universe... The impression of design is overwhelming.”¹¹⁵ Only minds produce information and design, and within the DNA code there is a tremendous amount of quantified information. DNA is the chemical language of life. It contains chemical “words” and “letters” (3.5 billion sequenced letters) that communicate genetic information.¹¹⁶ If the human DNA code were printed out, it would be on a stack of papers as tall as the Washington Monument, about a gigabit of information in computer terms.¹¹⁷ Former atheist Anthony Flew credits

¹¹² Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2009). Kindle Edition, Loc., 917-920

¹¹³ See Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)

¹¹⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986, 1996, 2006), 159

¹¹⁵ Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature’s Creative Ability To Order the Universe*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 203

¹¹⁶ See <http://www.yourgenome.org> for a basic understanding of the DNA code.

¹¹⁷ Cf., Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

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the evidence for design and the information (quantified complexity) in the DNA code as the means of his turn to belief in the existence of God.

What I think the DNA material has done is that it has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved in getting these extraordinarily diverse elements to work together. It's the enormous complexity of the number of elements and the enormous subtlety of the ways they work together. The meeting of these two parts at the right time by chance is simply minute. It is all a matter of the enormous complexity by which the results were achieved, which looked to me like the work of intelligence.¹¹⁸

The very fact that the universe is intelligible and that our minds can grasp this intelligibility is a strong case for the presence of a personal mind and will behind it all. The fact that the nature of the universe corresponds to our ability to understand it is remarkable. Einstein once commented, "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible."¹¹⁹

The creation, likewise, bears witness to the tri-unity of God, the divine community of Father, Son, and Spirit. Thomas Aquinas considered the Trinity as a "pure article" (*articuli puri*) of faith but Scripture seems to indicate its rational basis as a mixed article. For God's "invisible attributes

¹¹⁸ Antony Flew and Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God* (HarperCollins, Kindle Edition, 2009), 75. Flew further states, "Perhaps the most popular and intuitively plausible argument for God's existence is the so-called argument from design. According to this argument, the design that is apparent in nature suggests the existence of a cosmic Designer. I have often stressed that this is actually an argument to design from order, as such arguments proceed from the perceived order in nature to show evidence of design and, thus, a Designer. Although I was once sharply critical of the argument to design, I have since come to see that, when correctly formulated, this argument constitutes a persuasive case for the existence of God. Developments in two areas in particular have led me to this conclusion. The first is the question of the origin of the laws of nature and the related insights of eminent modern scientists. The second is the question of the origin of life and reproduction" (Ibid, 95).

¹¹⁹ Cited by John Lennox in *God's Undertaker* (England: Lion Hudson. Kindle Edition, 2009, 2011), p. 59. The book *God's Undertaker* is highly recommended concerning further reading on this issue of design in the universe. John Lennox's other books and YouTube lectures are a great resource for the science and faith "debate."

... eternal power and Godhead [or ‘divine nature’ – θεϊότης, theiotēs]” are seen through creation (Romans 1:20). Henry Morris, a scientific apologist, held that the universe is essentially a trinity of trinities, and thus reflects the “three-in-oneness” of its Creator. There is much to commend concerning this insight. There are numerous natural phenomena that display a unity-in-diversity— a three-in-oneness. The existence of these actualities gives us insight into the ultimate ground of reality.

It is the doctrine of the Trinity that gives us particular insight into the nature of existence. The veracity of the Trinity has incredible explanatory power and scope to explicate reality. It gives true meaning and purpose to the nature of being. It answers all the enquiries of critical thought. The meaning and significance of the “one and the many” coheres in the ontological Trinity. There is a caution and clarification though in relating the finite and the infinite. The triune nature of the Infinite Eternal Creator-God can only be known analogically, and contingent, dependent being cannot speak univocally of the Trinity. The analogy of God’s tri-unity is found in the idea of three-in-oneness or simply **community**— com- [with] uni- [one] -ty [the state of] – “the state of being with oneness.”

There are some very intriguing realities in the universe that witness to the tri-unity of God. These “tri-unities” evidenced in “what has been made” are only finite analogies of the Infinite Trinity. Furthermore, all created actualities are finite and cannot contain or fully explain Infinite Truth. Therefore, we shall proceed with much “fear and trembling.”

SPACE/MATTER/TIME— UNIVERSE

It is no coincidence that the universe is called a “uni-verse,” a unity-in-diversity. The unity-in-diversity of the cosmos is the interpenetration and unity of space, matter, and time. The tri-unity of space, matter, and time is seen in the interrelation and interdependency of each one in the other. Matter is in space and is experienced through time. There can be no matter without space, and neither can be separated from time. Matter (a “what”) must have a “where” (space) and a “when” (time) to actually exist. There is a true unity in their diversity. They are distinguishable but not separable. *General Relativity* (GR) informs us that there is a unique unity between space and time. GR also informs us that matter can distort both space and time. A black hole, like the one that exists at the center of our Milky Way

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galaxy, can severely distort space and time. Only real things can be distorted and twisted. Therefore, space and time are real “things” along with matter. The universe is comprised of three real things existing in unity— space, matter, and time. Henry Morris writes, “The perspective of modern science is clearly that of the universe as a space-mass-time continuum, with each of the three entities essentially indistinguishable from, and coterminous with the other two. One universe, manifested in terms of three conceptual forms.”¹²⁰ That is, a “UNI[ty] -in- [di]VERSE[ity].”

Three-Dimensions (Space)

The nature of three-dimensional space is illustrative of the infinite and eternal God. Height, width, and depth make up what is called “3-D space.” The three dimensions of space can be differentiated but not divided. They can be conceptually distinguished but never separated in actuality. Each dimension cannot be considered or visualized without reference to the other. Furthermore, they are conceptually and potentially infinite in themselves. The three dimensions of space are each distinguishable from the others, and yet, each one is conceivably infinite, comprising the whole of a potentially infinite space. The ideas of co-eternal and co-equal apply to each dimension of space in reference to the others. It is possible to have mathematical conceptions of one dimension, two dimensions, or three dimensions, but there is no way to separate them in the real universe— 3-D space is truly a unity. It is possible to take a picture or have a video that only contains two dimensions of a three-dimensional image, but even in this there is a virtual third dimension inherent. There is no way to actualize a real two-dimensional existence. Such things can only be spoken of conceptually as in mathematics, or in novels as in Edwin Abbott’s *Flatland*.¹²¹ Even “flatlanders” would have a very minute existence in a third dimension. If you draw them on a piece of paper, that paper will have a third dimensionality to it, as will the lead from the pencil. It is absolutely impossible to conceive of biological life in anything but three dimensions.¹²² Space must be three-in-one in order for reality to exist. It

¹²⁰ Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Master Books, 2002) Kindle Edition, Loc. 1010-1016.

¹²¹ *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884) by Edwin Abbott.

¹²² Morris, *Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, Kindle Loc. 1037-1040

cannot be any other way for life, as we know it, to exist. Does the reality and necessity of this “three-in-oneness” flow from the very nature of God?

Past–Present–Future (Time)

The nature of time is the subject of much study by both physicists and philosophers. There are two basic views of time, the A-theory and B-theory. The A-theory interprets only the momentary present as real and the B-theory understands that the past, present, and future are all equally real.¹²³ The B-theory seems to be the view that emerges from the data of physics. Most physicists hold to the B-theory of time while philosophers are split between the two views. Regardless of either theory, time is still another tri-unity of creation. Time is composed of past, present, and future. Henry Morris explains the relationship of past, present, and future time. He writes,

It is wonderful to realize that time consists of future time, present time, and past time. Each is quite distinct in meaning, and yet each is the whole of time. All time has been future and will be past. And in the process whereby future time becomes past time, it passes through the present. The future is the unseen and un-experienced source of all time. It is made visible and manifest, moment by moment, in the present. It then moves into the past, into the realm of experienced time. Man’s consciousness of time pertains only to the present, but this does not lessen the reality or the significance of both the past and the future in his experience and understanding. He is enabled to understand the present, and even to some extent the future, in terms of the past. But both his recollection of past time and his anticipation of future time are visualized in terms of his consciousness of present time.¹²⁴

¹²³ See any work on the “philosophy of time” or “ontology of time.” Cf. Sean Carroll, *From Eternity to Here* (Dutton, 2010); William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Crossway, 2001) and L. Nathan Oaklander, *The Ontology of Time* (Prometheus, 2004)

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 1072-1078.

As with the A-theory or B-theory of time, time began at the beginning of the universe. Within either theory of time, time is still a tri-unity. Time is comprised of past, present, and future. Since time is a created property, there was no “before” or “future” in reference to the universe before creation. Time began with space and matter, thus forming the “uni-verse.” Time began as a unified whole starting with present-time. Time did not begin in diversity but in unity with present-time. The future and past flowed from the present beginning the motion of time, forming a unity in diversity. There is a sense in which all three were unified at the beginning and are interrelated in such a way that the one becomes the other through the motion of time. The three-in-oneness of time is understood in the mutual indwelling of the one in the other as time moves to the future. As time moves, the future becomes the present and the present becomes the past. Time flows anticipating the future, experiencing the present, and recollecting the past. As will be seen, the indwelling of each person in the other within the Trinity is a vital aspect of Trinitarianism being illustrated, though imperfectly and analogously, through the nature of time. Time is the past, present, and future, each distinct, yet flowing in and out of the other thus forming a unified whole— Time.

Solid–Liquid–Vapor (Matter)

The tri-unity (three-in-oneness) of matter can be illustrated best with the most common of substances— H₂O (water). Water is one substance that exists naturally in three forms— solid, liquid, and vapor. Water is commonly experienced as ice, liquid, and steam— one substance in three forms. These three forms exist for all elements under “normal” conditions. This, of course, would exclude the Bose-Einstein-condensate and plasma state of elements when they are cooled or heated to “extreme” temperatures. There is also a special occurrence when water can simultaneously exist in all three states as a real trinity. This is called the triple-point of water. It happens when water is placed in a vacuum tube and the temperature is dropped while pressure is reduced. The combination of pressure and temperature at which water becomes solid, liquid, and vapor (a tri-unity) occurs at approximately 32°F, or 0°C, with a pressure of 0.006 of the earth’s atmosphere. The triple-point of water is a valuable analogy and illustration of the Divine nature. All natural illustrations fall short of a

univocal correspondence to the Godhead, and caution is necessary. But the fact that nature and reality exist in many three-in-one relationships is very telling and reflects the subsistence of the Godhead analogically.

The **dynamic power** and the **divine personhood** of God are displayed in the heavens (Psalms 19:1). The first chapter of Romans verse twenty (Romans 1:20) confirms an important principle of natural theology. That is, the doxa knowledge of God, His “invisible attributes, both his eternal power and deity,” is communicated and made manifest through the creation of the cosmos. This construction is an appositional clause, which is expegetical or explanatory. It explains what the invisible attributes are, i.e., His “eternal power” and “deity [θειότης, theiotes].” “Theiotes” literally means “divinity,” “divine nature,” “divine being,” or “Godhead.”^{125, 126} The nature of the Deity (God-ness, divine essence) is revealed through creation. It is not a stretch to suggest that the tri-unity of God is in view here among other truths. The phrase, “his eternal power and deity” is also followed by εις (eis), a preposition of purpose, “so that....”. The display of God’s “eternal power” and “deity” render mankind “without excuse” or “without a defense” (αναπολογητος, anapologētos). The display of God’s nature in creation is doxological and apologetic. Man is without “an answer back” or “an apologetic” before God. Likewise, the nature of creation serves as a powerful apologetic to mankind. The problem is that the knowledge communicated is also the knowledge rejected. The truth of God is suppressed in unrighteousness and becomes darkened and confused (Romans 1:18,19-32).

The creation declares the **glory, goodness, and greatness** of the One who “spoke” and all things “were made” (Psalm 33:6, 9). The apex and climax of God’s handiwork was the creation of mankind. All peoples from all tribes, tongues, and territories are made in the image of God. Humanity was created with the innate sense of morality, mortality, and meaning; we know right from wrong, we desire life and eternity, and we know life must have purpose. Man has the inherent sense of both the terrestrial and transcendent realities. God is communicated in the moral cognizance

¹²⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 139.

¹²⁶ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 446.

and constitution of man. God's revelation of Himself is evident both "to" man and "in" man (Romans 1:19, NKJV). It is "to" man by way of His glory, goodness, and greatness and "in" man by way of his conscience and constitution.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THE CONSCIENCE – SENSUS DIVINITATIS

There is a sense in which the knowledge of the existence of God is intrinsic, inherent, and immanent in man by virtue of his moral constitution and rational capacities. "*For whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things of the law, these, although they do not have the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written on their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts one after another accusing or even defending them*" (Romans 2:14–15).¹²⁷ The knowledge of God through man's **conscience** and **constitution** is self-evident, though it is confused and darkened by the fall of mankind (Genesis 3:6-7). Calvin writes, "That there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity [*sensus divinitatis*], we hold to be beyond dispute."¹²⁸ The Divine imprint or *sensus divinitatis* is most evident through the function of the conscience in man. The moral law is undoubtedly etched on the very mind and heart of man, and therefore, calls out in witness to the existence of the author of both the material and immaterial aspects of man (i.e., body and soul/spirit). This moral law is also accompanied by a sense of the eternal and infinite, it is the evidence of a transcendent reality touching and invading the terrestrial realm. "*He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NKJV). In view of the *sensus divinitatis*, Calvin went so far as to say that "this belief is naturally engendered in all, and thoroughly fixed as it were in our very bones."¹²⁹

The **doxa knowledge** of God is naturally implanted in all men. However, since the Fall of mankind in Adam,¹³⁰ the doxa knowledge of

¹²⁷ See Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Volumes 1 and 2 (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), Vol. I, 5-9.

¹²⁸ John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), *Institutes* I, iii.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, iii, 3.

¹³⁰ Cf. Romans 5:12ff

God has become confused and darkened, and the **soteric knowledge** of God has been totally lost resulting in spiritual and biological death.¹³¹ Aquinas explains, “To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature.”¹³² This confusion is due to the devastating effects of sin on the human mind and heart. God’s existence would be perspicuously self-evident if Adam had retained the knowledge of God’s essence through relationship. Through sin the knowledge of God was lost, since Adam forfeited his relationship with God through disobedience. One aspect of salvation is the restoration of the knowledge of God through the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:30; Matthew 22:14). The (soteric) knowledge of God and eternal life are interrelated and connected in Scripture (John 17:3; cf., 2 Peter 1:3). In the truest sense the knowledge of God is restored in salvation. Christ through the Spirit restores what was lost in Adam. This soteric knowledge results in the perspicuous self-evident knowledge of God in the believer. The doxa knowledge of God in **creation** and **conscience** has been mired and confused by the Fall, and therefore, the soteric knowledge of God must be communicated (through Gospel preaching) and restored (through Spirit regenerating) “*in*” and “*to*” the person for salvation. The goal or “*telos*” of the special revelation of God (*infralapsus*)¹³³ is the salvation of mankind. Aquinas writes that “it was necessary for man’s salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God, besides philosophical science built up by human reason [via creation and conscience]... Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation.”¹³⁴ The necessity of this “divine revelation” or supernatural revelation is due to the fact that mankind has corrupted, rejected, and suppressed the doxa knowledge of God (Romans 1:21,22-27,28,29-32).

¹³¹ Since God is Being itself (He is life, light, and truth), the lost of relationship and the knowledge of God “naturally” resulted in mankind’s death. Death resulted in Adam when the relationship and knowledge of the “foundation of life” (Psalm 36:9) was forfeited.

¹³² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.2 a.1 ad.1.

¹³³ I am using the term *infralapsus* (given the order of decrees in the infralapsarian view, see footnote 101) to suggest that after the fall, it became necessary for God to provide salvation to man and so provide Scripture (special revelation) to mankind. “IF” the fall had never happened, the knowledge of God for all might have been intuitive—directly communicated by the Spirit without the necessity of the inscripturated word of God.

¹³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.1 a.1 resp.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN CREATION AND CONSCIENCE REJECTED

The doxa knowledge of God or the knowledge of God in creation and conscience, which is known through general revelation, can only condemn a fallen human being— “*so that they are without excuse.*” This is because the doxa knowledge of God has been confused by sin; general revelation does not have the ability to save a sinner. This is not a defect in the content or channel of general revelation; it is a defect in the receiver. To illustrate, if a television station sends out an integral digital signal, it will not be received or processed correctly without proper functioning equipment. In order to receive and translate the digital signal there must be a digital receiver and a High-Definition television set, and both must function properly. The digital signal cannot be deciphered by an analog television set, regardless of its integrity. As human beings stand in sin, they are more like broken analog televisions. As such, the divine signal through general revelation, which is detected as noise, cannot be understood or deciphered and is, furthermore, rejected (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 1:18-19). The TV remains happy to function as a dust collector and attractor. Imagine the scenario, such technological capabilities and engineering beauty just collecting dust and dirt, while rejecting any sense of its true purpose and nature. This is the picture of intellectual darkness and rebellion in mankind (Romans 1:21-22). This is why, ultimately, the “TV” must be “remanufactured” with HD capability and “fitted” with an internal digital receiver— “You must be born again” or “born from above” (John 3:7). Fallen man must be “remanufactured” or regenerated by the Spirit of God (Titus 3:5).

Due to the defect of sin in man, the divine signal in creation and conscience only has condemning power. It cannot communicate the soteric knowledge of God that leads to salvation. The effect of sin on man has such devastating consequences that it precludes any epistemological link, which results in the soteric knowledge of God, apart from supernatural grace. In other words, the light of natural reason can never restore the knowledge of God that was lost by Adam. Nevertheless, mankind stands before God without excuse or defense. “*Because what can be known about God is evident among them, for God made it clear to them. For from the creation of the world, his invisible attributes, both his eternal power and deity, are discerned clearly, being understood in the things created, so that they are without excuse*” (Romans 1:19–20). The fact that mankind is “without excuse” before the testimony of general revelation means that they are

guilty before God. The doxa knowledge of God is, therefore, not salvific; it can only produce culpability.

The condemning power of general revelation can be illustrated as follows. Suppose that a man is in need of \$5,000 to travel to Israel. He is then given \$1,000 as a result of the generosity of his church family. Now, we find this man with \$1,000 but with a \$4,000 deficiency. Is the \$1,000 worthless? No, but it is insufficient to send him to Israel. Consequently, the man who really never wanted to go after all regards the \$1,000 gift as worthless and discards it. He also fails to consider the generosity of his church family and does not respond in seeking further “grace.” Had he responded favorably to the gift, he would have discovered that Pastor Joshua had bought \$5,000 gift cards for all who desired to go to the Promised Land. As a result, he is guilty of discarding the \$1,000. This is the case of all mankind under general revelation. It is the basis upon which mankind is held accountable and responsible before God.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Scripture seems to indicate that throughout every dispensation God had a prophet and/or some form of special revelation. There is sufficient evidence from Scripture that an oral form of revelation was in the world immediately after the Fall by which mankind could be saved by faith. This is seen in Cain and Abel’s knowledge of worship and sacrifice, most certainly taught to them by Adam. This deposit of revelation was given to/through Adam even the proto-Evangelium in Genesis 3:15. From Adam to Noah, there was a prophet in the world and therefore a means of special revelation that people could respond to in faith. For example, Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). Enoch was a prophet and only the “seventh” from Adam (Jude 1:14). Adam’s grandson through Seth, Enosh, had a revival of sorts in his day with mankind beginning to call on Yahweh, the personal name of God known only through revelation (Genesis 4:26). After Noah, there was a significant core of oral revelation that can even be seen in the numerous but corrupted accounts (in over 200 cultures) of the Creation and Flood story. God’s oral truth from Noah to Abraham progressively became severely corrupted, but by the time of Abraham a man named Job seemed to have an accurate and intact form of the true worship of God. This was how people were saved before Scripture was given. If someone never heard this means of salvation, which certainly was the case for many, God still held them responsible for sin because of General Revelation, especially, in view of the presence of the conscience (Romans 2:15). Now, if anyone responded favorably to General Revelation, we might certainly conjecture that the sovereign God provided a means of special revelation by a messenger (or God Himself) that a person could respond to in faith and so be saved, (this phenomena is attested to presently in the Muslim world). God saves His elect by faith! Salvation was always through a deposit of revealed truth that people needed to respond to by faith in God.

The Scripture elaborates on mankind's guilt and rejection of the natural knowledge (cognitio naturalis) of God. The Apostle Paul writes, *"Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy"* (Romans 1:28–31, NIV). The phrase, *"they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God"* is very telling in the original Greek; it is "οὐκ εδοκίμασαν τὸν Θεὸν εἶναι ἐν ἐπιγνώσει" (ouk edokimasan ton theon echein in epignosei), "they did not regard God as worthy to hold in [their] knowledge." The word δοκιμάζω (dokimazō) means "to regard something as genuine or worthy on the basis of testing."¹³⁶ Dokimazō has the particle of negation before it οὐκ (ouk) and thus, the phrase "ouk dokimazō" means that "they" regarded God Himself unworthy, worthless, not genuine. The implication is that "they" knew better and "they" are culpable. This is because the glory of God (doxa knowledge) is clearly perceived and revealed in creation (vs. 20).

Furthermore, the word δοκιμάζω (dokimazō) implies that a decision was made based on some sort of experience. This was a willful, informed, and existential decision on their part. The infinitive εἶναι (echein) "to have" and the prepositional phrase ἐν ἐπιγνώσει (in epignosei) "in knowledge" form a Greek idiom that means, "to recognize something as being what it truly is."¹³⁷ A survey of various translations brings out the meaning of the idiom "to have in knowledge" clearly: "They did not see fit to recognize God" (LEB); "they did not see fit to acknowledge God" (ESV); "they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer" (NASB95); "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (KJV). The expanded exegetical translation by Kenneth Wuest reads, *"And even as after putting God to the test for the purpose of approving Him should He meet their specifications, and finding that He did not, they disapproved of holding Him in their full*

¹³⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

and precise knowledge” (WUESTNT).¹³⁸ Their full culpability is seen in the fact that the God who they regarded as worthless is revealed “in them” and “to them” (vs. 19). The Apostle writes, “*Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them*” (Romans 1:19, NKJV). The revelation of God “to” mankind and “in” mankind is insufficient for salvation because of the effects of sin, not because of the quality or means of the revelation. The innate knowledge of God was (and is) rejected because “*people loved the darkness rather than the light*” (John 3:19). Through sin, the knowledge of God was confused and lost to mankind. It was lost at the real, historic space-time fall of Adam. It was a real fall with real consequences. “*Just as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned*” (Romans 5:12). Through sin the doxological knowledge of God is confused and rejected and the soteriological knowledge of God is lost.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD RESTORED

The soteric knowledge of God is revealed and mediated through the Spirit of God. In light of the *Fall* and the noetic effects of sin, mankind has no capacity to know God apart from grace. The light of natural reason is worthless in the attainment of the soteric knowledge of God, which brings salvation. The natural man in sin does not have the capacity to understand or acquire the soteric knowledge of God. The Scripture confirms that “*the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Apostle Paul equates the soteric knowledge of God with the wisdom of God.¹³⁹ This wisdom is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. “*Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden*” (Colossians 2:2c–3). The manner in which the Apostle delivered this wisdom was not with the persuasiveness of speech or human wisdom, “*but with a demonstration of the Spirit and*

¹³⁸ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*, Ro 1:28 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961).

¹³⁹ The Apostle John calls the soteric knowledge of God, the “Word” of God, the “Light” of God, the “Life” of God. He also calls it the ‘*tou logou tēs zōēs*’ [the Word of the Life] and ‘*tēn zōēn tēn aiónion*’ [the Eternal Life, lit. the life of the everlasting ages] (John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-10).

power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). The restoration of salvific knowledge begins with the Spirit and ends with the Spirit. It is solely and completely the work of a sovereign God in grace.¹⁴⁰ This knowledge transcends the natural mind entirely. “*Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and have not entered into the heart of man*” (1 Corinthians 2:9). This knowledge must be supernaturally revealed and imparted, and is in no way attainable through natural means.

The Apostle Paul confirmed the supernatural origin of the soteric knowledge of God. “*For to us God has revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:10). Only the Spirit knows the essence of God; the deep things of God and can restore the knowledge of God, which imparts eternal life. This is because God’s essence is pure existence, and pure existence is His essence—God is “*the One who is*.”¹⁴¹ God is “life” and “truth” (John 14:6); He is the “light” and “eternal life” (John 8:12; 1 John 1:5; 5:20; Revelation 21:23; Isaiah 60:19). The restoration of the soteric knowledge of God cannot help but give life to those in whom it is divinely restored and communicated. This knowledge is much more than mere rational knowledge. It is spiritual knowledge (or “spiritual wisdom,” pneumatikos sophia, πνευματικός σοφία), which includes rational knowledge but also transcends it. The complete apprehension of this “full knowledge” (epignōsis, επιγνωσις) awaits the glorification of the Believer (1 Corinthians 13:12). Eternal life is given through the Spirit’s work in revealing, mediating, and applying the message of the cross. The depths of God, known by the Spirit are communicated to those who believe, and they are thus given the **mind of Christ**. This is the epistemological link. The Spirit communicates the message of the cross of Christ to the heart (through effectual calling),¹⁴² and it results in regeneration and imputed righteousness (Titus 3:4-7). The direct epistemological connection is the Holy Spirit, and the consequence is “the mind of Christ.” “*For who has known the mind of the Lord; who has advised him?*” *But we have the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16). The

¹⁴⁰ The nature of this work necessitates that it is monergistic.

¹⁴¹ I.e., Pure Actuality (*actus purus*), “I AM-ness”—‘εγω ειμι ο ων’, ‘egō eimi o ōn’ “I am the One who is”(Exodus 3:14, LXX; John 8:58).

¹⁴² This is the monergistic (one working i.e., God) work of God the Holy Spirit in salvation. Effectual calling is “God’s special working upon the elect so that they respond in faith.” Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Rev. ed., 1st Crossway ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 56.

soteric knowledge of God is restored through the direct communication of the Holy Spirit "...in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13). The Apostle John explains this sovereign epistemological work. "No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who hears from the Father and learns comes to me" (John 6:44–45). The work of the Holy Spirit restores the knowledge of God and creates a renewed mind and a believing heart.¹⁴³ "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how incomprehensible are his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given in advance to him, and it will be paid back to him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for eternity! Amen."— Romans 11:33-36

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD "IN CHRIST"

"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, NKJV). God defines and reveals himself when he identifies himself with the dead, buried, and resurrected Christ. The Gospel of the *Resurrected One* proclaims that the *Crucified One* is the self-definition and disclosure of the God, who is '*the One who is*'. It is in Christ alone, the Crucified and Resurrected One, that the knowledge of God is revealed and restored. Through faith¹⁴⁴ in the Resurrected One, the believer is reckoned and counted as righteous

¹⁴³ A new heart and a new mind was promised as a part of the New Covenant, only a new mind and heart can "receive" the soteric knowledge of God (cf., Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 11:19).

¹⁴⁴ Biblically, faith is the responsibility of man in the reception of the soteric knowledge of God. Since biblical faith is comprised of "knowledge," "assent," and "trust" and logically, knowledge precedes trust, we must conclude that "faith precedes regeneration," at least the "knowledge" and "assent" aspects.

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or “justified by faith” (Romans 4:3-5,6-25; 5:1-2). Through the cross of Christ, effectually applied by the Spirit through faith, a man is gifted the soteric knowledge of God. As a consequence of this grace, the believer is sealed with the Spirit and blessed with every spiritual blessing “in Christ.”

“Praised is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens *in Christ*, just as He chose us *in Him* before the foundation of the Cosmos, to be holy and blameless before Him, in love having predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the gracious intention of His will, for the praise of *the glory of His grace* that He graced us *in the Beloved One, in whom* we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of trespasses, according to *the riches of his grace*, which He caused to overflow to us in all wisdom and understanding, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His gracious intention which He purposed for Himself *in Him*, for the dispensation of the fullness of times, to bring it all to a head *in Christ*, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, *in Him* also we were chosen, having been predestined according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:3-11, *author’s translation and emphasis*).

SECTION II

The Being Of God

CHAPTER FIVE

The Existential Argument for the Existence of God—The Uncomposed Composer

God is the Sublime Simple Being, the Uncomposed Composer

– author

I felt in my bones that this universe does not explain itself.

– C. S. Lewis, cited in *Fundamentals of the Faith* by
Peter Kreeft

Many confusions in the doctrine of God and many apologetic weaknesses could be avoided if God were understood first of all as being-itself or as the ground of being.

– Cornelius Van Til, *Reviews*

Existential absoluteness alone can ground all existential contingency and becoming.

– James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts*

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BEING, ESSENCE, AND EXISTENCE

The ancient pre-Socratic philosopher, Parmenides (490 B.C.) once said, “Whatever is, is.”¹⁴⁵ What would at first seem like an obvious proposition is one of the most basic principles of reality. This is what is known as the *law of identity* (B is B). The law of identity is an undeniable and self-evident truth; it asserts that each thing is “what it is” and is not, another thing. Concerning this principle, Aristotle stated that “a thing is itself” and “to ask why a thing is itself is just a meaningless inquiry.”¹⁴⁶ The “meaningless” character of this inquiry is rooted in the self-evident nature of the law of identity. A statement is self-evident if the predicate is reducible to the subject, as in “I am myself.” Once the terms are understood, it is evident that the statement is true and corresponds to reality.

The Thomist Scholar, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange states, “that which is, is and cannot simultaneously not be.”¹⁴⁷ The added negation in the preceding proposition is a declaration of the *law of non-contradiction* (B is not ~B). It is another undeniable and self-evident truth. It states that something cannot “be” and “not be” at the same time and in the same way. “To be or not to be,” may be the question, as expressed by Shakespeare, but the answer will never be— “being is” and “being is not” (at the same time and in the same way). “To be” is to exist, to be an individual, a primary substance. “To be” is to have being and to be an existent being. “Whatever is” is real and has real existence. “That which is” has real being and to “not be” is simply non-being; it is nothingness. Nothingness, as Jonathan Edwards quipped, is what “sleeping rocks dream of.”

The laws of identity and non-contradiction are foundational for the discovery of truth and the knowledge of reality. The law of identity (B is B) is the affirmative statement about reality and the law of non-contradiction (B is not ~B) is the negative statement concerning reality, which is existence itself, “being is” (B is). That something “is” is the greatest self-evident and undeniable existential affirmation that can be made. Its denial is impossible because someone must “be” in order to deny anything, especially their own existence. It forces the discussion of reality into the realm of being, “why

¹⁴⁵ See R. C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts that Shaped Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009).

¹⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality, A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (Ex Fontibus, Kindle Edition, 2012), 407.

is there something rather than nothing?” Nothingness cannot be discussed, defined, or imagined. All the questions of reality and reality itself must start with the gratuitous nature of existence.

“Whatever is, is”— and is not another— will inexorably lead to “the One who is,” absolute necessary being (*ens necessarium*), One who is pure actuality (*actus purus*), and One who is subsistent being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*). “Whatever is, is,” the first step, necessarily depends on and leads us to “the One who is,” the last step in the analogy of being.¹⁴⁸ For without ‘*the One who is*’ there could never be being, “whatever is.” Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange writes,

If ... we maintain the absolute necessity of this principle [identity], we find that the supreme reality is identified with being as A is identified with A. The supreme reality then, is not becoming, is not creative evolution, but is Being itself [*ipsum esse*], ever identical with itself, in whom alone is essence [*essentia*] identified with existence [*esse*].¹⁴⁹

The concept of being refers to “*what a thing is*” and “*that a thing is*.” “What a thing is” (*essence*) and “that a thing is” (*existence*) are distinct in creatures (and things), but are identical in God. This is to say, that there is no distinction between the essence and existence of God. God’s essence is existence, or God essentially (of His essence) exists. The questions “what is God” and “is God” (does God exist) are answered in the same manner— “He is.” This profound truth was presupposed and served as the backdrop of God’s self-revelation to Moses. The philosophical underpinnings of God’s self-explanation are too significant to ignore. God revealed Himself to Moses as, “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:14). God revealed Himself as the very ground of being. This means that God is existence or being Himself— pure life and pure existence. He is the ground of being, the reason for all existent being. All things merely share in being. “All that is” only has being by participation (*esse commune*). They only partake or receive being, which is essentially possessed by God. It is also very important to say that God is not the superlative of our kind of being, even

¹⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 407-408

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 408.

though we call Him “the greatest conceivable being.” The being of God must be understood analogically. God is not the highest existent within *esse commune* but God is *Being* essentially and primarily, while creatures only have *being* in a derived or secondary sense.¹⁵⁰ God does not share in being; He transcends and is the ground of all existent being. God is subsisting being itself; He is absolute, transcendent, and the only ground and reason for contingent existence. “*For from him and through him and to him are all things*” (Romans 11:36, ESV). God is the source—“*from Him,*” the means—“*through Him,*” and the goal—“*to Him,*” of all that exists. It is in God that “*we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28, ESV). As such, God is subsistent being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*) and pure actuality (*actus purus*). James Dolezal explains,

The conception of God as *actus purus* and *ipsum esse subsistens* effectually places God beyond the creaturely mode and order of being, thus upholding his absolute transcendence, while at the same time explaining how such a creaturely order could possibly come to be in the first place. *Existential absoluteness alone can ground all existential contingency and becoming.*¹⁵¹

God, as pure act and subsisting being, is **simple**, and therefore, is not composite (made of parts) in any way. He is the ground of all being and the sufficient reason for “all that is.” As pure act, God has no potency at all. This will be developed later.

¹⁵⁰ We should start “with a twofold notion of existence (being) such that the existence (or being) of God is primary and of a different nature than the existence (or being) of everything else, which is secondary. In this way, we cannot simply posit existence without at the same time saying whether it is God’s existence that we are positing or something that exists because created by God.” K. Scott Oliphint. *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology*, 2006. Kindle Edition, Loc. 1194-1196.

The univocal concept of being in which God and creatures are simply different orders of being must be rejected. The univocal concept of being is the reason for most modern day rejections of classical theism. It is the error of Open Theism as well as some analytic and modal philosophers. Ultimately, it is the denial of the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS).

¹⁵¹ Emphasis added. James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness*. (Pickwick Publications, An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition. 2011), 93-94

The concept of being is foundational. As such, it is also the principal of language. The idea of being permeates our every day communications. Without the concept of “being,” predication would be impossible. Our indispensable two-letter verb, “is,”¹⁵² can function as a simple copula or it can be used to make existential affirmations concerning things, concepts, and truths. (see Table 9) Even our language reflects the fundamental truth that “B is” (something exists). Our grammar, sentences, communication, and even the understanding of ourselves are constructed around the forms of the verb “to be.” Phrases like “I am,” “it is,” “we are,” “we were,” “I was,” and “it will be” all have their root in the concept of being. Our self-designations are encapsulated in the notion of being. We are human “beings” because we have being. As we make predications of things, the notion of being is reflected in our language. But what makes “something” have being, or makes “something” a some “thing”? What makes an individual or primary substance a “real” being? What is an individual to whom predications can be made?

Individual beings are compositions of **essence** and **existence**. For example, the essence (*essentia*) of humanness must be instantiated by means of an “act of being” (*esse*) in order for that individual “to be.” This *esse* (also “act of existence”) is the very **act** of the potency of that individual’s essence (i.e., humanness). This “act of being” is limited by the essence that is instantiated.¹⁵³ The **potency** of a human essence must be actualized in order for a human being to exist. This is the metaphysical act of composition, which must take place for any individual or thing to ever exist. There cannot be an infinite regress in the composition of essence and existence, and therefore, this regress must end (or start) in One who is pure act and subsisting being. For example, in order for Adam, an individual substance, to exist he must have “existence” (*actus essendi* or

¹⁵² The present tense, third person singular of the verb “to be.”

¹⁵³ This is to say that with the essence of a gallon jug, the “act” of the “potency” is limited by the real potentialities of the essence of gallon-jug-ness. The “potency” is not true non-being; it is the essence, which is being actualized. This principle is stated in the second thesis of the Twenty-Four Thomistic Theses, “Act, because it is perfection, is not limited except by Potency, which is capacity for perfection [the capacity of a gallon jug is a gallon]. Therefore, in the order in which the Act is pure, it is unlimited and unique; but in that in which it is finite and manifold, it comes into a true composition with Potency.” In Aquinas see *Summa Theologiae*, 1 q. 7 a. 1 et a. 2; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 43

esse¹⁵⁴), added to humanness (*essentia*) by an efficient cause.¹⁵⁵ Richard Muller writes,

Any given individual must have *essentia* ... and *esse*, the act of existing ... a human being must have both humanity, the human *essentia*, and actual existence, *esse*. Actual existence without *essentia* is nonsense and unidentifiability, while the *essentia* of humanity without the act of existence or actual existence, *esse*, is a mere concept.¹⁵⁶

Adam, then, is a being by participation through the efficient causation of the One who is Being itself. As all things are wet by participation in water, so all that exists, exists by participation¹⁵⁷ in '*the One who is*' as their

¹⁵⁴ The "act" and the "fact" of existence can be distinguished: "esse" can refer to the metaphysical principle of "actus essendi" or "esse" can refer to the "fact of existence."

¹⁵⁵ It will be argued later that the entire universe is held in existence through a 'per se' causal chain, which must begin in the First Cause. All other causes that bring about contingent existence are mere instrumental causes. For example, my parents may have instrumentally caused my very existence, but all causes either, 'per se' or 'per accidens' must start in a First Cause and that in a 'per se' manner. Existence must be essentially possessed or there could never be instrumental causes. This is the simple answer to the age long question as to why anything exists.

¹⁵⁶ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), 105.

¹⁵⁷ This is the Thomistic doctrine of participation and is called "real" or ontological participation. Boethius writes, "What-is (*quod est*) can participate in something, but being itself (*ipsum esse*) in no way participates in anything. For participation occurs when something already is. Something is, however, when it has received being (*esse*)." Boethius in Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius*, trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), xxxi.

Aquinas explains the doctrine of participation in *On the Hebdomads* and writes, "To participate is, as it were, to take a part [of something]. And, therefore, when something receives in particular fashion that which belongs to another in universal (or total) fashion, the former is said to participate in the latter."

John Wippel explains the doctrine and says, "Aquinas ... lists a third kind of participation, which is also an example of real or ontological participation, whereby an effect may be said to participate in its cause ... if the act of existing and "that which is" differ only intentionally in perfectly simple beings, they differ really in composite entities. But because there is only one perfectly simple being (God), there is only

first efficient cause and Subsisting Being. The nature of participated, and therefore, contingent being necessitates that it is gratuitous, a gift of '**the One who is**'. This is the only rational conclusion, since the First Cause is not only personal but is also infinite goodness. The "Good" may be diffusive of itself,¹⁵⁸ but the One who is infinite goodness acts gratuitously by will and not by obligation or necessity. Infinite, perfect goodness must be intentionally and volitionally beneficent. Obligatory goodness is an imperfect notion; therefore, all being is gratuitous by participation in essential Being. Therefore, the individual human Adam is dependently existent by virtue of participation in the First Cause and his being is the result of beneficent Subsisting Being. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange writes,

All beings by participation depend on the Being by
essence as on their supreme cause. That which is being

one being which does not participate in the act of existing and which is subsisting existence itself. A finite or created nature or being participates in self-subsisting esse or God by likeness as in its unparticipated source and as in its first efficient cause..." Eds. Brian Davies, Eleonore Stump. *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), Kindle Edition, Loc. 1250-1270

Aquinas elsewhere expounds the doctrine of ontological participation and writes; "We can clearly conclude from this that the first principle of all things, which is supreme and more noble, is changeless and eternal. The prophet suggests this eternity of the Word when he says, seated, i.e., presiding without any change and eternally. "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Ps 44:7); "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). John points to this eternity when he says below (1:1), "In the beginning was the Word." Still others came to a knowledge of God from the dignity of God; and these were the Platonists. They noted that everything which is something by participation is reduced to what is the same thing by essence, as to the first and highest. Thus, all things which are fiery by participation are reduced to fire, which is such by its essence. And so since all things which exist participate in existence [esse] and are beings by participation, there must necessarily be at the summit of all things something which is existence [esse] by its essence, i.e., whose essence is its existence. And this is God, who is the most sufficient, the most eminent, and the most perfect cause of the whole of existence, from, whom all things that are participate existence [esse]." St Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary of The Gospel of St John*. (Kindle Edition) Loc. 333-340.

For further explanation see "The Five Ways" by John F. Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*. Ed. Brian Davies (Oxford University Press, 2002, Kindle Edition) Loc. 2870-2871

¹⁵⁸ A Platonic and Neoplatonic principle that denied the freedom of God to create; the Good is necessarily diffusive of itself, therefore, God as Good had no option but to create.

by participation is not its own existence, since we must distinguish the subject which participates from the existence which it receives and participates. . . . [Adam] . . . is not his existence, but has his existence, received from Him who alone can say: I am He who is, I am existence itself.¹⁵⁹

The One who is “existence itself” is the God of Scripture (Exodus 3:14). He is “*the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last*” (Revelation 22:13, cf., Isaiah 44:6; 48:12; Revelation 1:11, 17, NKJV). There is no other besides the God of Scripture who reveals Himself as the ground of all being. For anything to ever exist; for there to be “being identical to itself,” there must needs be One whose essence is identical with existence— full and perfect Being. There must be One who **essentially exists**, is essential Being. The One who essentially exists is subsisting self-existent Being, which is Pure Actuality. He is “I AM,” or the One “who is, who was and who is to come” (cf., Revelation 1:8). Joseph Pohle writes,

Only an uncreated, self-existent Being can be called Being in the full and perfect sense of the term. “All nations are before him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to him as nothing and vanity” [Isaiah 40:17]. . . . Tertullian develops this idea briefly and beautifully as follows: God is unique, and He is unique because He is sole, and He is sole for the reason that nothing co-exists with Him. Thus He is also the first, because all other beings come after Him; and the reason they come after Him is that they are of Him, and they are of Him, because they are created out of nothing.¹⁶⁰

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

All being is contingent and dependent by virtue of its composition. Participation itself is an act of entering into composition with something

¹⁵⁹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality, A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, 409-410.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Pohle and Arthur Preuss, *God: The Author of Nature and the Supernatural*, Dogmatic Theology (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1916), 10–11. Tertullian, *Contr. Hermog.*

in order to form a whole. Participation is also the actualizing of potency. For example, a dog has the potentiality to get wet and becomes wet through actualizing that potency, and it may be said that the wet dog participates in water, which causes the wetness. In like manner, metaphysically, an essence participates in existence through *esse* (*the act of being*) in order to have being. Whatever is brought into existence has had its potency, its potential for existence by virtue of its essence, actualized. This makes existent being a composition of both “act and potency,” and “essence and existence.”

The actualization of a potency, and any act of composition or decomposition is called “motion.”¹⁶¹ Aquinas asserts that “in everything which is moved, there is some kind of composition found.”¹⁶² Being is the composition of *essentia* (essence) and *esse* (act of being or existence), through the “motion” of coming-to-be, which makes it an individual or substance. Being, therefore, is a composition of essence and existence, which is also like the motion of “potency” to “act.” Potency is related to essence, and act is related to existence. Existence is really the “act” of essence. Aquinas writes in *On Spiritual Creatures*,

¹⁶¹ “*Motion* ... is either ... the sense of an activity or operation, or ... the sense of a process or development from potency to actuality. Thus (1) the activity or operation of the soul in its faculties of intellect and will or ... its desire or appetite. In each of these motions, the basic capacity or faculty of intellect, will, or desire moves from its existence as such, or primary actuality, to its fulfillment or realization in operation, or secondary actuality. The sense of *motion* as activity or operation therefore points toward the underlying meaning in Aristotelian metaphysics: (2) the process or development from potency to actuality. In the Aristotelian schema adopted by most of the medieval scholastics and by the Protestant orthodox, the potential dualism of form and matter is avoided by the assumption of a union of matter and form in all things. The material substratum of the thing is a potency, or potential, for form or, more precisely, for the actualization of form—while the form is an inner principle of self-realization, an inner goal toward which the process or development, the *motion*, of the thing is directed. *Motion*, therefore, is the principle of development which unites form [or essence] and matter in a thing. Since Aristotelian physics assumes rest unless motion is introduced, the *motion* ... in finite things always requires a prior efficient cause or a mover for its existence. Ultimately, since all finite movers both move and are moved, the chain of causality demands a first mover who moves without himself being moved, i.e., God, the self-existent, necessary, fully actualized being.” Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), 196–197.

¹⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.9.1.

Since every thing participates in the First Act [God] by assimilation insofar as it has esse [existence], the participated esse [existence] in each thing must be related to the nature [essence] which participates in it as act to potency.¹⁶³

As affirmed by Aquinas and others, essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*) are as potency is to act.

All existent being is in composition as to *essentia*, which is as **potency** and *esse*, which is as **act**. Therefore, all being is composite and contingent, and subsequently, in need of a Composer— an Uncomposed Composer.¹⁶⁴ Francis Turretin confirms that “composition is ... the formal reason of a being originated and dependent ... [for] ... nothing can be composed by itself, but whatever is composed must necessarily be composed by another... God is the first and independent being, recognizing no other prior to himself.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, the nature of the universe and all it contains declares that an essentially existing Being created it—actualizing its essence, composing its being that it may exist.¹⁶⁶ This “first” and “independent being” is the composer of “all that is,” (including angels)—composing “essence and existence” through the act of creation. “All that is,” (the physical universe) is in composition as to “life” (i.e., *matter and form*), “motion” (i.e., *act and potency*), and “being” (i.e., *essence and existence*).

¹⁶³ I.I.

¹⁶⁴ The essence of the “Uncomposed Composer” would be absolutely Simple as well as Pure Actuality. As the composer of all essence and existence He would be simple and *ipsum esse subsistens*— *Subsisting Being Itself (per se esse— Necessary Being)*. As the actualizer of all potencies He would have no potentialities Himself, and thus, be Pure Actuality. If He had any potency we would need to look beyond Him for His actualizer. This one would need to be in a higher state of actuality in order to actualize His potency. That which is act must already have what it actualizes. This cannot be an infinite regress. Act and potency must start in Pure Act or nothing would be actualized! And that which is in need of composition must ultimately start in one who is uncomposed, i.e., simple.

¹⁶⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 1:191–192. Aquinas also confirms, “Every composition requires a compounder: for if there be composition, it results from several things (i.e., parts): and things that are several in themselves would not combine together unless they were united by a compounder.” *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.18

¹⁶⁶ The “essence” of the universe is indifferent to the notion of existence; it could either “be” or “not be.” It is existentially neutral or inert.

The Composition of Being - Acts 17:28

Life	Motion	Being
Form /Matter	Potency/Act	Essence/Existence

(Table 3)

Motion is simply the undergoing of change, either substantially or accidentally. Motion is the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality; it is the act of that which is in potency. Thomas Aquinas describes motion as “the actuality of a being in potency.”¹⁶⁷ Whatever is in motion is in act, and therefore, cannot be both mover and moved in respect to the same thing. Accordingly, anything that is in motion must be moved by another. Since, that which is moved to exist must be generated by what is already in existence. All things are in motion as they come-to-be, change, or cease-to-be. All things are indifferent or neutral to this motion, and therefore, they are dependent on another for their movement or actualization. This is the *Principle of Motion*. It is not locomotion, it is the motion of act and potency; hence, it is not related to the principle of inertia. Aristotle explains, “Everything that is in motion must be moved by something.”¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, motion cannot be an infinite chain, as “it is not possible to proceed to infinity in movers and things moved.”¹⁶⁹ A thing’s coming-to-be is also an instance of motion; it is the actualization of an individual (a suppositum). Aquinas also states, “Nothing begins to be or ceases to be except through motion or change.”¹⁷⁰

The Apostle Paul professes this truth in the presence of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on Mars Hill. He proclaimed that in God “we live and **move** and have our **being**” (Acts 17:28, *emphasis added*). This is an implicit statement that God is, indeed, pure actuality and subsisting being. The Apostle Paul was certainly not ignorant of the philosophical weight of this statement. Authorial meaning and the immediate context

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, IX.1.1770.

¹⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Physics* VII. See also, *Aristotle on Method and Metaphysics*, ed. Edward Feser (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 236

¹⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol. 1, 24. See also Terence Irwin and Gail Fine, *Aristotle: Selections*, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 153

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, 7.

of a passage is an important aspect of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. With this in view, it is obvious that his audience would have understood “motion” and “being” in its Aristotelian context. Further, the fact that the Apostle Paul quoted the Greek poet, Epimenides, with approval, confirms the truth of the underlying philosophical principle along with its theological assertion. This is an example of truth by the light of natural reason or general revelation, which is also witnessed to by Scripture. As far as the philosophical notion of “life,” “motion,” and “being” is concerned; mankind’s seeking (ζητεω, zēteō) for God resulted in this apprehension of reality (Acts 17:27).¹⁷¹ The truth is that the natural man can grasp the “doxa knowledge of God,” and this is God’s reward for such “groping” (Hebrew 11:6).

THE DISTINCTION OF ESSENCE (ESSENTIA) AND EXISTENCE (ESSE) – E/ε

A thing’s existence is not a part of its essence; it is other than or distinct.¹⁷² Essences (concepts, forms, or ideas) are not yet; they are potentialities—potencies in need of an act. Therefore, every *essence* is in need of *esse* (*act of being* or *actus essendi*) in order to have “real being.”¹⁷³ For a “real being” its existence is merely accidental, it is non-essential to “what it is.” Existence in contingent being is “*per accidens*” in relation to its essence. In other words, existence (*esse*) is not a part of a thing’s essence

¹⁷¹ Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 339.

¹⁷² “Therefore it is clear that *esse* is other than *essence* or *quiddity*, unless perhaps there is something whose *quiddity* is its very *esse*”—Aquinas. This is the case with God, whose *essence* or *quiddity* is His *esse* (existence). God’s *essence* is pure existence.

¹⁷³ What I am calling “real being” is the exact opposite of Plato’s “really real,” as he would consider the *essence* or *form* as the “really real” where I am calling the instantiated *form* or *essence* the “real being”—that which is the result of the conjoining of an *essence* with an *act-of-being*. This is the Aristotelian concept of the individual or primary substance and the Thomistic idea of the composition of *essence* and *existence* in the coming-to-be of a being, e.g. Jasper the dog. More specifically, for Aquinas this would be the composition of *essence* and a *suppositum* (individual). *Essence* and *existence* is the larger concept. The composition of *matter* and *form* (*essence*) also make a material individual. The archangel, Michael, is composed of *act* and *potency*, and *essence* and *existence*; the human individual, Kenny, is composed of *act* and *potency*, *essence* and *existence*, and *matter* and *form* (*essence*).

(essentia), “what it is.” It is distinct and must come from without in order for it “to be.” Further, things are understood and defined by their essences and not their existence. “What a thing is” can be fully comprehended without any reference to “that it is,” whether it exists or not. Aquinas explains, “for a thing is not intelligible except by virtue of its definition and essence.”¹⁷⁴ All things are defined according to their essences, which does not include their existence. In this, the real distinction of essence and existence becomes clear. The definition of a three-dollar bill remains the same whether or not it actually exists. Its definition does not inform us of its actual existence. The distinction of E/ε is further illustrated in our ability to know, for example, what a triangle is without any reference to whether or not a particular triangle actually exists.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, in all things there is a distinction of essence and existence. Etienne Gilson elaborates,

It cannot be doubted that this distinction is real, but it arises in the metaphysical order of act and potency, not in the physical order of the relation of parts within a material whole. This distinction is real in the highest degree, since it expresses the fact that a being whose essence is not its act of being has not of itself the wherewithal to exist. We know from experience that such beings exist, since they are all we know directly. They exist therefore, but we know too that they do not exist in their own right. Since their lack of existential necessity is congenital, it is with them as long as they endure. So long as they exist, they remain beings whose existence finds no justification in their own essence. It is this that is the distinction between essence and the act-of-existing.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 1

¹⁷⁵ There is a significant difference in whether or not a thing actually exists. There is a world of difference between the concept (essence) of three dollars and the “real being” of three dollars. The difference is *esse*, or *actus essendi*: an *act of existence*.

¹⁷⁶ Etienne Gilson. *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. (Random House Publishing Group, 1956. Kindle Edition), Loc. 745-751

The argument for the distinction of E/ε can be formulated as follows.

- (1) No essence can be known without an understanding of those things that are a part of an essence. In other words, an essence is understood when all of its parts are comprehended.
- (2) Whatever is not included in the understanding of an essence comes from outside of that essence and makes a composition with it.
- (3) Every essence or thing can be understood without knowing whether or not it actually exists in reality.
- (4) Therefore, existence is other than essence in things—E/ε is really distinct.¹⁷⁷

Since existence is not a part of a thing's essence it can only be added to an essence through an "*act of being*." For anything to exist there must be One, and only one, in whom essence and existence are identical (who is not a thing, but is the ground of being in all things, who would be "*ipsum esse subsistens*") or the composition of essence and existence could never be actualized. This One would be "*esse per se*" (being essentially) and not "being qua being" (being among being). This One would be "*esse purum*" (pure being), "*esse tantum*" (being alone), and "*actus purus*" (pure act). As "pure being" and "pure act" this One would be the First Cause of all that is, actualizing all things. This metaphysical understanding underlies Aquinas' Third Way, he writes,

We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, *because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing*. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in

¹⁷⁷ This argument is called the *intellectus essentiae*.

existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary.¹⁷⁸

The vital distinction of essence and existence in being has been understood in philosophy and theology for centuries. Al Farabi (AD 872-950) and Avicenna (AD 980-1037), who were Islamic philosophers, both taught the distinction of essence and existence. It was the Church Father, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (AD 480–524) who first expounded this important distinction and heavily influenced Thomas Aquinas, but all of these men, including Aquinas, were students of Aristotle and Plato’s thought. Boethius in *On the Hebdomads* made the fundamental distinction that “‘What a thing is’ [esse] and ‘that it is’ [id quod est] are diverse.”¹⁷⁹ He taught that a thing’s form or quiddity (whatness) was one thing, and a

¹⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.2 a.3 resp. [*emphasis added*].

The argument of Al Farabi (AD 872-950)

(1) Beings exist which could possibly not exist. (2) Such beings exist only accidentally (3) Such beings must have received their existence from another (4) An infinite regress of causes of existence is impossible since all such beings receive their existence from another. (5) Hence, there must be a First Cause of existence whose essence and existence are identical. Cf. Norman L Geisler. *A History of Western Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval* (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, Kindle Edition, 2012), Loc 4323-4328

The argument of Avicenna (Ibn Sina) (AD 980-1037)

(1) There are possible beings (2) Whatever possible beings there are have a cause for their being (3) But there cannot be an infinite series of causes of being. There can be an infinite series of causes of becoming (like father begets son, who begets son, et cetera.). But there cannot be an infinite series of causes of being, since the cause of being must be simultaneous with its effect (4) Therefore, there must be a first Cause for all possible beings (5) This first Cause must be a necessary Being, for what is the cause of all possible beings cannot itself be a possible being. It must be a necessary Being. See *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 4441-4447

¹⁷⁹ “diversum est ‘esse’ et ‘id quod est’ ” Boethius, *On the Hebdomads (On the Sevens)*. Boethius’ use of “esse” corresponds more to Aquinas’ use of “essentia.” Boethius’ “id quod est” (“that which is”) is used more as existence or esse for Aquinas. But as some scholars have pointed out, “esse” for Boethius sometimes means “essence,” other times “form,” and still other times “actual existence.” Some suggest using “being” for “esse” in Boethius to avoid terminological precision that is not warranted. There are “Seven” self-evident axioms of Boethius that contribute to the argument for the distinction of “essence and existence” in things. They are:

thing's existence was another. This distinction is the difference between the form/concept/essence *in reason (in ratio)*, and its actualized existence, *in reality (in re)*. This is the differentiation between the concept of "running" and the actual "runner." Aquinas comments,

Therefore he says first that *being (esse) and that-which-is (id quod est) are diverse*.... For we signify one thing by saying "to be," and something else by saying "that-which-is," just as we also signify one thing when we say "to run," and something else by saying "one running." For "to run" and "to be" are signified in the abstract, just as "whiteness" is; but "what-is," that is, "a being," and "one running" are signified in the concrete, as is "a white item."¹⁸⁰

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1. Being (esse) and that which is (id quod est) are diverse. For being itself (ipsum esse) as yet is not. That-which-is however, once the form of being (essendi) has been taken on, is and stands together.
 2. What-is (quod est) can participate in something, but being itself (ipsum esse) in no way participates in anything. For participation occurs when something already is. Something is, however, when it has received being (esse).
 3. That-which-is (id quod est) can possess something other than what it itself is (quod ipsum est). Being itself, however (ipsum uero esse), has nothing else outside itself as an admixture.
 4. However, to be something (tamen esse aliquid), and to be something in this, that <a thing> is (esse aliquid in eo quod est), are diverse. For by the former (illic), accident is signified; by the latter (hic), substance.
 5. Everything that is participates in that which is being (eo quod est esse) with the result that it be. It participates in something else with the result that it be something. And through this, that-which-is (id quod est) participates in that which is being (eo quod est esse) with the result that it be. It is, however, with the result that it can participate in anything else you like.
 6. In every composite, being (esse) is other than the item itself. Every simple item possesses its being (esse) and that-which-is (id quod est) as one.
 7. All diversity is discordant, whereas similitude must be sought. And what seeks something else is shown to be itself by nature such as that which it seeks. From Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius*, trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius*, trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 17.

This distinction makes all existent things dependent and contingent as demonstrated earlier. As such, their existence is not necessary; they could either be or not be. Aquinas confirms that “everything whose act of existing is other than its nature must have its act of existing from another.”¹⁸¹ Therefore, a being that does not exist essentially but exists “*per accidens*” (as a composition of E/ε), must be brought into existence by another. This composition must begin with One who exists essentially and necessarily; One whose existence is “*per se*.”

The distinction of essence and existence (in things) is further evidenced in the fact that the intellect can comprehend “what a thing is” in reference to the essence alone, without any reference to an instantiated instance of any particular thing. For example, the “human nature itself exists in the intellect as abstracted from all individuating characteristics (i.e., apart from the actual individual).”¹⁸² The mind can understand the essence of a man without knowing whether or not that man exists in reality. The intellect can grasp the essence of the great star-pilot and Sith Lord, Darth Vader, without any consideration of the actual existence of Anakin Skywalker. The mind can also comprehend the quiddity (what-ness) of a Dodo Bird or a Brachiosaurus; the fact that they no longer exist has no bearing on the intellects comprehension of their essence. Aquinas demonstrates this point decisively.

Whatever does not enter into the understanding of an essence or quiddity comes to it from without and enters into composition with the essence, since no essence could be understood without the parts that make it up. Every essence or quiddity, however, can be understood without its being understood that it exists in fact; for I can understand what a man or a phoenix is, and yet not know whether they are given in reality. Therefore, it is clear that existence is other than essence or quiddity, unless indeed there should be some thing whose quiddity [essence] is its existence [as in God]; and such a thing [i.e., God] could only be unique and first.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 4.

¹⁸² Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* in *Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings* (Penguin Classics. Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition. 1998), 39.

¹⁸³ Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 5.

The great chain of being must start in One whose existence is “*per se*,” i.e., essential and necessary. The argument can be either *a priori* or *a posteriori*. It can start with the necessary existence of an Uncomposed Composer, who is metaphysically simple,¹⁸⁴ and move to the existence of contingent being.¹⁸⁵ This sublime simple starter rationally explains and is existentially necessary for anything to come-to-be. The argument can also be made from contingent being back to the necessity of the uncomposed composer, arguing from effect back to cause. For “every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them ... every composite has a cause, for things in themselves ... cannot unite unless something causes them to unite.”¹⁸⁶ This is the power of the argument, for existence must be added from without in composed, contingent being. Ralph McInerny writes,

It seems clear enough that natural things do not exist by definition, as if existence were what they are or part of what they are, since, if that were so, they could not not be. But natural things are simply things which come into being, then cease to be. If there is something which exists by definition, which cannot not exist, it is unique and first, it is God.^{187, 188}

¹⁸⁴ Essence and existence are identical

¹⁸⁵ Essence and existence are distinct

¹⁸⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, STh., I q.3 a.7 resp.

¹⁸⁷ Ralph McInerny, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 95

¹⁸⁸ The distinction of E/ε also brings to bear an interesting issue in Anselm’s Ontological Argument and its rejection by Kant. The argument itself is founded upon the real distinction of the definition (essence) of something and its actual existence in reality. God is a simple being, as His essence is His existence, so a true understanding of the essence of God demands that the ontological argument is true. The angels would have no problem with the Ontological Argument. But because existence is not a predicate or property, Kant dismissed the argument. Existence though is a second level predicate; see the chart (Table 9) “*the Predication of Being: the Analogical Use of Being*.” But, because of sin, the weight of the ontological argument is lost. We do not know the essence of God, so, confusion exists over the fact that with God, existence is His essence or proper definition. “What God is” and “that God is” is answered the same way. God is “*the One who is*.” This is self-evident in itself but not to fallen man. As argued previously, with the restoration of the “soteric knowledge of God,” the ontological argument is valid and self-evident to believers. In this,

ACT AND POTENCY AS ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

The first of the *Twenty-Four Thomistic Theses* states, “Potency and act divide being in such a way that whatever is, is either Pure Act, or of necessity it is composed of potency and act as primary and intrinsic principles.” As seen above, all being is composed of essence/existence, and act/potency. All composition is actually a variation of the act/potency distinction. The act/potency relationship is fundamental in all being. Without this essential understanding all being would erroneously fall under the category of pantheism. James Dolezal confirms that “matter and form ... existence and essence ... substance and accidents [as] models of composition are understood as variations of the composition of act and potency.”¹⁸⁹ The fact that being is divided (as to different essences) is the only answer to the ancient Parmenidean pantheists (and pantheism in general). Pantheism was the Parmenidean solution to the problem of the “one and the many,” also called the issue of “unity in diversity.” Norm Geisler explains,

[T]he real distinction within being (*ens*) between essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*) seems to be the only satisfactory answer to the Parmenidean problem of unity and plurality. Without an analogy of being there is no way to account for multiplicity. In univocity of being things are either unrelated or identical. Further, if being is taken univocally then there can only be one being; all being is then identical (entire sameness leaves no room for any difference in being). Furthermore, if being is taken equivocally, then there can be no more than one being. For if this is being and everything else is totally different from it, then everything else is nonbeing. For what is totally different from being would be nonbeing. The only way to avoid the monistic [pantheistic] conclusion that follows

the distinction of essence and existence in things, and the identity of essence and existence in God are made most evident!

¹⁸⁹ James E. Dolezal. *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* Pickwick Publications, (An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition, 2011), 32

from either an equivocal or a univocal view of beings is to take an analogical view.¹⁹⁰

The act/potency distinction seen in the differentiation of essence and existence is the basis for the *analogy of being*. Norm Geisler further states that essence and existence “...are related as actuality is to potentiality ... finite beings have different potentialities (essences), these finite beings can be differentiated in reality when these potentialities are actualized or brought into existence in different kinds of being.”¹⁹¹ In order for a potency to be actualized it must be moved upon by another. This is true whether it is seen in the composition of essence and existence in something coming-to-be, or the acquisition of knowledge by a professor. This is also the argument of Aquinas’ First Way, he writes,

Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality.¹⁹²

The identity of essence and existence in God attests to the truth that He is pure actuality. *God is Pure Act because He essentially exists*. He exists out of His own essence and has no potency or motion whatsoever; this is also the definition of His immutability. In order for any potency to be actualized there must be one who is already in act. The composition of act and potency must have started in One who is pure act, with no admixture of potency at all, or that One would have to look to another for its potency to be actualized. It is existentially (ontologically) necessary that there is One who “essentially is,” or nothing would ever come-to-be. This is the answer to the greatest question ever contemplated— “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

¹⁹⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 100–101.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 101

¹⁹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.2 a.3 resp.

God is Pure Act and He actualizes all potency or motion. There would not, and could not, be any motion without Him. Aquinas affirms, "... whatever is in potency is, by that very fact, movable."¹⁹³ Therefore, God is the mover of all potencies, yet He Himself is unmoved. If God were not Pure Act, no potencies could ever be actualized. If God's essence and existence were not identical, nothing would ever exist. Because God is Pure Act, He can initiate motion and stand as the ground and cause of all being.

CAUSATION (FOUR CAUSES)

There are four modes in which causation may be distinguished or differentiated. They are called the four Aristotelian causes: (1) *Efficient Cause (causa efficiens)*: this is the productive or effective cause of a thing. It is the agent that produces "motion" (i.e., locomotion, substantial or accidental motion) in any sequence or series of cause and effect, a causal chain. (2) *Material Cause (causa materialis)*: this is the substantial basis of motion, the matter of which a thing is made. It is the material (matter) on which the efficient cause operates. (3) *Formal Cause (causa formalis)*: this is the essence or nature of a thing. It defines what a thing is to be. The definition of a thing is according to its essence or form. (4) *Final Cause (causa finalis)*: this is the ultimate purpose for which a thing is made or an act is performed. It is the teleological aspect of causation, the function of a thing.

The Four Causes

	Formal Cause	Material Cause	Efficient Cause	Final Cause
Definition	Form(essence)	Matter	Actualizing a Potency (Actualizing Existence)	Purpose/Goal/Function
Automobile	Car-ness	Metal/Plastic/Rubber / Leather	Manufacturer (Ford)	Transportation

(Table 4)

The "four causes" are intimately related with the **formal** and **material** cause (*matter* and *form*), and the **efficient** and **final** cause (the *purpose* for

¹⁹³ Ibid., 9.

which the *agent acts*) forming couplets. Matter without form is unintelligible and efficient causation without final causation is incoherent. Interestingly, final causation is the most rejected form of cause in the world of science today. It is no wonder that efficient causation (its couplet) is not far behind in its denial. The misunderstanding of quantum mechanics is to blame for the present denial of efficient causation. David Hume once quipped, “I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that anything might arise without a cause.”¹⁹⁴ But this is exactly what some are doing in our day. They deny causation by invoking quantum mechanics. But the probabilistic nature of quantum mechanics does not do away with causation any more than the probabilistic outcome of flipping a coin does away with the coin or the “flipper.”

The existence of the quantum vacuum (which contains an enormous amount of energy that randomly produces virtual particles) cannot be said to just “be” without an efficient cause. The “quantum foam” is simply energy in a state of potency;¹⁹⁵ as this energy decays it produces virtual particles. The quantum foam is just the vacuum energy (zero-point energy) of empty space. Albert Einstein has demonstrated that space is not a “nothing.”¹⁹⁶ Actually, space and time are interwoven and came-to-be at the moment of creation, along with matter and energy. Empty space is indeed something by virtue of its immense power and time dimensions. It is called the fabric of space-time and is a “something” that is in need of an efficient cause for its coming-to-be. The quantum fluctuations of empty space may be random, but so are the waves of the ocean. The random movement of the waves of the ocean (or wave behavior in general) does not “prove” that the substance in which they propagate or the waves themselves are uncaused. A sufficient reason must still exist, even for quantum potencies, because the things that are random or considered as the result of “chance” still

¹⁹⁴ Quoted by Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 288.

¹⁹⁵ Heisenberg writes, “The probability wave of Bohr, Kramers, Slater... was a quantitative version of the old concept of ‘potentia’ in Aristotelian philosophy.” For a brief discussion on this issue see the short article by Edward Feser, “*Heisenberg on Act and Potency*,” <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.jp/2009/09/heisenberg-on-act-and-potency.html?m=1> (accessed on June 24, 2014).

¹⁹⁶ “Before the world existed there wasn’t even a vacuum; for a vacuum is not a simple absence of something but a space capable of housing bodies in which no bodies exist; and before the world existed there was no place and no space.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, Ed. by Timothy McDermott, 88

fall under their universal cause, which is the Unmoved Mover.¹⁹⁷ Nothing moves apart from the *Mover* of all things, for in Him (God) all things “move.” (Cf. Acts 17:28a).

The energy that permeates the smallest levels of reality (the quantum vacuum) testifies to the act/potency distinction in all existent being, and therefore, testifies to the necessity of a prime mover to initiate all “motion.” Ernan McMullin writes, “Energy itself is in a real sense an expression of potentiality. It almost seems that it is to the potential, rather than the actual, that reality should be attributed at the most fundamental level.”¹⁹⁸ At the quantum level, when a particular potency is actualized, it is said that “a quantum collapse of potentialities” (the wave function) occurs and a thing becomes a reality. One of the most interesting things that have been discovered by neuroscience is that the brain functions according to quantum mechanics and not classical mechanics. With every thought in the brain, a wave is collapsed and an effect is produced. The question is what collapses the wave function? Evidence suggests that it is the mind (consciousness), which is distinct from the physical brain. It is the “ghost” in the machine. It is the immaterial part of an individual (the soul/spirit), which acts on the brain in a causal manner and thus collapses the wave function.¹⁹⁹ Neuroscientist Mario Beauregard writes, “There is a series of possibilities; a decision causes a quantum collapse, in which one of them becomes reality. The cause is the mental focus... It is a cause, but not a mechanical or material one.”²⁰⁰ This means that neuroscience has given us evidence for non-material causes, which act in the world at the

¹⁹⁷ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.103.6 and I.103.7. He said, “It is possible for an effect to result outside the order of some particular cause; but not outside the order of the universal cause.”

¹⁹⁸ Paul Davies and Niels Henrik Gregersen, *Information and the Nature of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Kindle Edition, 2010), 33.

¹⁹⁹ Not only this, but there is evidence that consciousness, through observation, collapses the wave function (the wave of potentialities). This was confirmed through the “box-pairs” version of the “double-slit” experiment, which causes the probability wave to collapse into a particle by the simple the act of observation. For a scientific discussion concerning this phenomena see *Quantum Enigma: Physics Encounters Consciousness*, 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press, 2011 by Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner, chapter five and especially chapter seven, “the two-slit experiment: the observer problem.” Quantum entanglement is also related to this phenomenon.

²⁰⁰ Mario Beauregard and Denyse O’Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 34. Consider also the *Quantum Zeno Effect*.

quantum level. So far from disproving causality, the nature of quantum mechanics actually proves the existence of nonmaterial causes, which act at the quantum level. The evidence of neuroscience is that the mind has real causal power over the material parts of the brain. Our thoughts are not our brains. Our thoughts exist in an immaterial reality and our thoughts produce real effects at the quantum level. This is not to mention the phenomenon of quantum entanglement and “faster than light” causality between particles. How much more likely then is it that quantum mechanics is actually giving us suggestions for the reality of the immaterial Mover of all things.²⁰¹

There is nothing about the nature of the quantum vacuum that suggests that it exists without a cause or exists essentially— as an eternal “prime energy”²⁰² that can actualize itself. In the words of David Hume, an effect without a cause is “absurd.” Even if the connection between a cause and its effect cannot be clearly discerned, as in the case of the random production of an alpha particle by a Uranium 238 atom probabilistically, it does not follow that the cause does not exist or that the particle just “popped” into being from ontological nothingness. The Uranium 238 atom is still the reality from which the alpha particle is produced; regardless of which atom in the group produces the particle in a statistical manner. A Uranium 238 atom is not nothing! It is safe to say that such alpha particles do not come-to-be without a Uranium atom; even if the underlying reason for which atom produces the particle is not fully understood or is statistical. This quantum phenomenon does not do away with the principle of causality. Therefore, the law of causality still stands as the cornerstone of reality— “Every effect must have a sufficient cause.”

²⁰¹ I am simply illustrating how things act at the quantum mechanical level, and I am not suggesting that God created by “collapsing a quantum potency.” God created ex nihilo (out of nothing) and so created and infused the universe with an unimaginable amount of energy. Even the quantum “nothingness” is something and must have had an efficient cause, God. The great fallacy today within cosmology is to redefine nothingness as if it was something out of which all things can come. The old phrase “ex nihilo nihil fit;” “out of nothing, nothing comes,” still stands!

²⁰² This is a reference to Aristotle’s theory of “prime matter” which was considered “pure potency.” See the work of the International Congress “Aristotle and Contemporary Physics” with CERN and the Interdisciplinary Centre of Aristotle Studies. There is a lot of work being done presently, which considers the relationship of Aristotle’s theory of prime matter and quantum physics: <http://www.dikam.auth.gr/en>

CAUSATION: 'PER SE' AND 'PER ACCIDENS'

There are two types of causal relationships called "per se" and "per accidens." Accidental or "per accidens" causes are like the relationship of a Pool Player's cue ball (the white ball) and the eight ball as the cue ball hits the eight ball into the side pocket. Essential or "per se" causes are like the relationship of the cue stick in the hand/arm of a Pool Player. Once the player's hand ceases causal contact with the cue stick, the cue stick loses all power to act as an agent on the cue ball. Likewise, if the hand ever lost its contact with the arm, it too would lose causal power. The cue stick is only an instrumental or secondary cause (of the hand) in the motion of the cue ball. The ordered "per se" causal series is seen in the hand-arm/cue stick relationship. The cue stick/cue ball/eight ball relationship is a "per accidens" relationship. The cue stick could dissolve after hitting the cue ball and the cue ball would still have causal power to act upon the eight ball. It is wrongfully thought that this sort of series "could be" infinite, because this series must also start in a "per se" relationship as with the hand/cue stick order.²⁰³ All "per accidens" causal series must start in a "per se" causal relationship. The cue stick cannot move into the cue ball without a prime mover (the hand-arm) and an infinitely long cue stick is no better. The cue stick has sustained causal power through its "per se" contact with the Billiard player's hand.

An ordered causal series "per se" is one in which its members exist and perform their causal work simultaneously. The members, "downstream" in the causal chain, exercise their causal power by virtue of the "motion" of their predecessors in the series. Ultimately, the **causal power proper** exists in the **prime mover** of the series. In an ordered "per se" series, if the cause is removed the effects will no longer move or "be." This is not the case in a "per accidens" series; if the cue ball suddenly explodes one-second after hitting the eight ball, the motion of the eight ball does not cease. All immediate efficient causes are simultaneous with their effects. This is to say, that all causal relationships are actually simultaneous, "per se" or "per accidens." But a "per accidens" cause does not have to abide in being after it causes its effect. It can cease-to-be after its causal act. Aquinas writes in *De Principis Naturae* that "it should be understood in

²⁰³ Another problem is that an actual infinite cannot exist. This is the power of the Kalam Cosmological Argument. (Cf. The writings of William Lane Craig)

speaking of actual causes that what causes and what is caused must exist simultaneously, such that if the one exists the other does also.”²⁰⁴ Aristotle also writes in *Physics*, “It is clear that when a thing moves because it is moved, the mover and the mobile object are moved simultaneously.”²⁰⁵ All causal relationships are indeed simultaneous, but a “per se” cause remains in sustaining causal contact. A “per se” cause is both a **generating** cause and a **sustaining** cause. This is the nature of “per se” causation; it remains in sustaining contact with its effect. As in a “per se” causal series the agent remains in sustaining contact, giving all its secondary causes (the members downstream) their causal power.

“Per se” causation and causal chains may be further illustrated in the manner in which a train moves along a track. While the locomotive is in causal contact with its cars, they all move in a simultaneous fashion. The engine or locomotive is the agent of motion for all the cars that are in contact with it. The locomotive actualizes the cars’ potential for motion (due to their essence) as it acts upon them. The motion of the train (the locomotive and cars) is simultaneous, but once causal contact is broken with the engine the cars have zero causal power on their own and their motion stops. In order for the cars to achieve motion and stay in motion, the locomotive must move upon them. The locomotive is both the generating cause and sustaining cause of the train’s motion.

No matter how long a train may be, it must have a first self-mover, which causes all locomotion or it will never move. The addition of cars will never be a sufficient reason to account for the train’s motion. This is why a causal series cannot be infinite. An infinite number of cars will never move the train, just as, an infinitely long cue stick will never move the cue ball. In a “per se” causal series, all movers are instrumental and secondary movers, which participate in the prime mover’s motion. All motion must begin with a Self-mover that is not moved by another. This Unmoved Mover must essentially (of its essence) have the power of motion. In order to actualize all motion, it must ultimately be “pure motion” or pure act itself. In this we are speaking figuratively of how God creates and sustains the universe.

²⁰⁴ Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae*, 5.34

²⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, VII.2.892

THE UNIVERSE/MULTIVERSE

The evidence for a finite, created universe is the most well attested fact of science. The facts of science are continually stacking up in favor of an intelligent, personal cause of the universe. It is no surprise that man is trying to distort, suppress and push the scientific data far beyond its implications. The history of twentieth-century science is full of examples of people who were unsettled by the theistic implications of certain scientific discoveries. One example is Albert Einstein's own reaction to his theory of *General Relativity* (*GR*). While formulating his theory, Einstein immediately grasped the undeniable implications of his equation. It confirmed that the universe had a beginning in time, and therefore, a Beginner. His work demonstrated that the universe began in a singularity of space, time, matter, and energy, which expanded from this point of origin a finite time ago. Since the universe began from a point of nothingness, it must have had a Beginner. Einstein did not deny the law of causality, and so, sought a way out of this "God conclusion." He went so far as to postulate an antigravity factor (λ – the cosmological constant) that would halt the expansion of the universe indefinitely, in order that, an infinite amount of time could elapse and the universe could stand as the "essentially existing reality" that explained itself.

In the twenty-first century, since General Relativity has been demonstrated as scientific fact, and the universe has been proved to have a beginning; scientists have been quite clever with their hypotheses. Their speculations have ventured to get around the theistic implications of the Big Bang and have resulted in a model of an infinite multiverse. It is thought that postulating an infinite multiverse makes God an "unnecessary hypothesis," and so, the endeavor is tireless. The reasonable attempt to unify General Relativity with quantum mechanics began the march from sound science to scientific faith; a faith in an infinite multiverse where God is not there. The attempt to unify General Relativity with quantum mechanics resulted in a quantum theory of gravity and thus introduced what is called *String Theory*. String theory answered many issues, and was mathematically elegant, but there were five different versions of it, and so, the pursuit continued. In an attempt to develop a *Grand Unified Theory* (G.U.T.), String Theory turned into M-theory and "branes" came along, which are two and three-dimensional strings. Inflation was postulated in order to fix the "Horizon problem," and now we have an infinite number

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of “bubble” universes through runaway inflation and an infinite eleven-dimensional multiverse through M-theory. It seems that somewhere in the middle, good science turned into atheistic ideology for the express purpose of getting around the Big Bang and God. Most atheists will appeal to the Multiverse as the explanation of all things in order to oust God from the equation. Of course, all this is a simplified account and there are actually four different multiverse models, each having their own adherents.

The Multiverse models are understood as level’s I, II, III, and IV. The level I multiverse is the most reasonable model, since it simply describes what is beyond our observable universe. The observable universe is a light sphere about 28 billion light years in diameter, but because the universe is expanding there may be another 120 billion light years beyond what we can see. The level I multiverse would include what is beyond our universe and what is beyond that, and so on, based on light speed spheres or cones. The inflationary theory yields a level II multiverse, which would be an infinite number of “bubble” universes that form through inflation like soap bubbles. The decoherence interpretation of quantum mechanics yields a new universe every time a quantum possibility is collapsed, thus yielding a level III multiverse with some 10^{500} possibilities of splintering worlds. The level IV multiverse is truly an infinite anything is possible multiple doppelgänger filled reality. The degree of speculation increases amid each multiverse scenario with the level III and level IV being the most non-scientific and even science fiction based.²⁰⁶

But, no matter which multiverse model is put forth, the problem still remains; an infinite multiverse is still composite, and therefore, contingent. A multiverse is still composed of essence and existence (E/ε). There is nothing about the nature of the multiverse (level I, II, III, or IV) that would necessitate its existence. The reason for the Multiverse’s existence is not in itself, it is not “a se” or “per se.” Every multiverse would be composed of things that are “generated” and “corrupted,” which further necessitates a Cause. Aristotle writes, “If there is a cause of the generation and destruction of things that move themselves there must also be a cause of the fact that their generation and destruction is perpetually continuous.”²⁰⁷ As such, in a multiverse all things are composed of “matter and form” (even higher-

²⁰⁶ For a brief and easy explanation of the various multiverse models please see “*Who’s Afraid of the Multiverse?*” by Jeff A. Zweerink, Reasons to Believe, 2008.

²⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Physics VIII*: L12.1074.

dimensional strings), and all things are composed of “act and potency.” This leaves a multiverse or a universe in need of a Prime Mover who would move all things but would not be in need of being moved, an “a se” and “per se” Unmoved Mover or Uncomposed Composer. Even an infinite multiverse must be held in existence, its motion must be sustained. The Universe or Multiverse (U/M) is a “per se” causal series and must have a generating cause and a sustaining cause, even if it were infinite. There is no such thing as “existential inertia.” Existence tends toward non-existence, in a kind of “existential entropy.” The nature of (composed) reality is that things “fall out” of existence; they undergo generation and corruption, they come-to-be and cease-to-be.

Things composed of essence and existence must be held together in being, and that, by One whose essence is to exist. The first/prime mover in a “per se” causal series is logically prior and metaphysically prior, but not necessarily temporally prior. This is why even an infinite multiverse must have a first Unmoved Mover, a Creator. This is the argument of Thomas Aquinas in his First Way. Most today misunderstand the argument of the First Way. The majority of those claiming victory over Aquinas have not taken the time to read the *Summa Theologica* or understand its underlying metaphysics (e.g., Richard Dawkins²⁰⁸). Actually, Aquinas believed that the universe could *not* be proved to have had a beginning; nevertheless, God would still be its cause and reason for existence, even if eternal. Aquinas believed that if the universe could be demonstrated to have had a beginning (as modern science has proved) then, the existence of the Beginner would be a thorough gone conclusion. He writes, “For the world [universe] leads

²⁰⁸ See his treatment of the Five Ways in *The God Delusion*. It is also interesting that even great Christian scholars have misunderstood Aquinas’ Five Ways and have thus disagreed with him over a fiction. For example, J. Oliver Buswell in his *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion vol. 1* (p. 79-81) makes an attempt to criticize Aquinas’ Five Ways by suggesting, “There is no logical reason why one motion after another could not have continued from eternity past.” Buswell’s critique of the First Way is based on a grave misunderstanding of what Aquinas was arguing. Aquinas was referring to “per se” causal chains. He writes later in the *Summa*, “In efficient causes it is impossible to proceed to infinity *per se*—thus, there cannot be an infinite number of causes that are *per se* required for a certain effect. . . . But it is not impossible to proceed to infinity *accidentally* [per accidens] as regards efficient causes” Aquinas, STh., I q.46 a.2 ad 7. It may be suggested that most disagreements with Aquinas come from a poor understanding of what he actually taught. This can also be seen in Francis Schaeffer when he suggests that Aquinas “separates” nature and grace, cf., Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*, 12.

more evidently to the knowledge of the divine creating power, if it was not always, than if it had always been; since everything which was not always manifestly has a cause.”²⁰⁹

The first verse of Scripture declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The Hebrew verb translated, “created” is the term “bara.” The only subject of this verb in Scripture is God. No other substantive is used in reference to this verb; only God can act in a “bara” manner. Inherent in this word is the idea of “generation” and “sustaining.” Creation is an act of generation “out of nothing” and a continual sustaining in being. Creation is not staccato— “create,” but is instead legato— “creeeeeaaate.” Creation is like a melody that is being performed; the artist must generate and sustain the melody throughout its existence. Creation is not like a song recorded and played back at any time. Once the artist stops performing, the song does not exist, though its essence may still be in the mind of the artist. The artist must add an “act of being” to the melodic essence in order to bring existence to the song. God both generates and holds creation in existence in a similar way, “...all things were created through him [Christ] and for him, and he himself is before all things, and in him all things are held together” (Colossians 1:16b–17).

THE ARGUMENT

- I. The being and existence of the *Universe* or *Multiverse* (U/M) is a “*per se*” causal series [starting in the Big Bang or an infinite 11-dimensional multiverse]. The U/M contains both “*per se*” and “*per accidens*” causal relationships in its parts. All “*per accidens*” causal chains must start in “*per se*” causation or they would never come-to-be (generation). As to the being of all things, they stand in a “*per se*” causal relationship to God as the generating and sustaining cause of their being.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.46 a.1 ad 6. The Timothy McDermott, *Summa Theologiae, A Concise Translations* reads, “[F]or a world that had a beginning more clearly points to its cause than one that has existed forever. God exists before the world in eternity, not in time.”

²¹⁰ “Even supposing that the world always was, it would not be equal to God in eternity, as Boethius says (*De Consol.* v. 6); because the divine Being is all being simultaneously without succession; but with the world it is otherwise.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.46 a.2 ad 5

Rationale: Adam's "being" (the first human being) began "*per se*" (as a direct creation of God) and Seth's "being" (Adam's son) came-to-be "*per accidens*." Adam, as Seth's father, could have ceased-to-be and Seth would still have the ability to beget his own children apart from Adam's causal power. But Seth's being is still related to God (as the first and primary cause) in a "*per se*" manner as the very ground of being, and as his sustaining cause. The chain of existence for the U/M began and is held together by One who is existence Himself. The U/M continues to exist by "participation in being" caused "*per se*" by this One. Being or existence is caused "*per se*." Matter and form and other composites are caused "*per accidens*" but they must essentially start in a "*per se*" causal relationship.

- II. The U/M is the sum-total of its parts, the things that are composed of essence and existence. The addition (composition) of existence (*esse* or *actus essendi*) and essence (*essentia*) is an example of "*per se*" causation. An agent (God) must act in order to **generate** and **sustain** the composition of essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*). This is the case for the being of the U/M; this is "*per se*" causation.
- III. It is impossible for the U/M to be its own efficient cause or agent. The U/M does not essentially (from its essence) exist; it is composed of essence and existence. Therefore, the U/M stands in need of an efficient cause. Further, the U/M exists contingently and dependently since it is composed. Also, U/M is composed, in its parts, of things that come-to-be and pass away (generation and corruption). Since the parts of the U/M are contingent, it further demonstrates that the whole is contingent and is in need of a Cause for its being.²¹¹

²¹¹ This argument is not subject to the fallacy of composition. If a fence is composed of red boards, it follows logically that the whole fence is red. Further, that which is composed is dependent and contingent, necessarily, in two ways: it is dependent upon its parts, which comprise the whole, and it is dependent upon the composer, the agent that actualized the whole from the parts. As James Dolezal noted, "To be composite is to be composed by another and to be dependent upon the parts that enter into the composition." *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*, 31.

Syllogistically: Every part of the universe needs a cause. The whole is the sum of all the parts. Therefore, the whole universe needs a Cause, which is God.

- IV. It is impossible for efficient causes, “*per se*,” to be infinitely ordered. Further, a thing composed of essence and existence must be **held together**. The Agent who is its cause also sustains it through causal contact. In “*per se*” causation, the agent is the generating cause and the sustaining cause of its effect. Also, the ordered causal series must start with One whose essence is identical to its existence, or nothing would ever come-to-be. The ground of all composite being (i.e., act and potency, and essence and existence) must itself be simple (without parts), which is to essentially and necessarily exist (this is to have the identity of essence and existence), because all composite things are (and must be) generated in order, “to be.”

Syllogistically: Every contingent (dependent) being has a sustaining cause (in the present). The whole universe (or multiverse) is contingent presently. Therefore, the whole universe [or multiverse] has a sustaining Cause (in the present).

- V. Therefore, there is a First Cause whose essence is identical with its existence. This first efficient cause is existentially/ontologically necessary as “subsistent essential existence itself” (*ipsum esse per se subsistens*). The first efficient cause of all being is itself Pure Being, or Pure Act.
- VI. The First Cause of all that exists, by definition, is God. The Cause of all being must be Being itself, the First Cause is necessary being and beyond mere being. ***The One who is*** is the most reasonable name for the one who is the ground of all being. The first efficient cause of all things is the God of the Bible who revealed Himself to Moses as “ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν.” “I Am,” “the One who is” or “He who is” (Ex 3:14 MT, LXX).

CHAPTER SIX

The Existence of God — the 'ego sum' argument

THE LAWS OF THOUGHT

The laws of thought can be used to establish the existence of God. Since God can be known through His effects,²¹² it can be demonstrated from “being” itself that there is One who is (essential) “Being” Himself, and therefore, the ground and reason for all being. Contingent being can be traced back to essential and necessary Being. The fact that something “is” is inexorable proof that there is *‘the One who is’*.

The proposition “being is” (B is), is known as the *Law of Existence*. It is one of the laws of thought called *First Principles*.²¹³ “These first principles of practical reason,” C.S. Lewis writes, “are fundamental to all knowledge and argument. To deny them is to deny knowledge itself.”²¹⁴ The law of

²¹² “Demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called *a priori*, and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration *a posteriori*; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1 q.2 a.2 resp.

²¹³ “First principles are the foundation of knowledge. Without them nothing could be known.” Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 250.

²¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 87.

existence actually states the incontrovertible truth that there is “something rather than nothing.” This principle is self-evident and undeniable. To deny, “being is,” is “to be” yourself. A man must have existence in order to deny his own existence (as demonstrated earlier). From the undeniable fact that “I exist” it can be demonstrated that the “I AM” exists. The knowledge of self leads to the doxa knowledge of God, “that God is.”

Starting with the Law of Existence (B is) and the Law of Identity (B is B) we can build a foundation for the natural knowledge (*cognitio naturalis*) of God. These two rational principles are stated as “*being is*” and “*being is being*.” The laws of thought are actually reflections of the Divine Mind. James O. Buswell, Jr. writes, “In epistemology we believe that God ... has created us to be in some measure capable of intelligent apprehension of truth. We regard the basic laws of logic as derived from the character of God’s intelligence.”²¹⁵ The nature of God grounds epistemology and is the source of logic and rational thought. To be rational is to think God’s thoughts after Him. To think is to participate in the Divine Mind, not pantheistically, as if our thoughts are a part of the Divine Mind, but as our very source and power to reason. As to walk is to participate in the power of walking. Aquinas explains, “The light of natural reason itself is a participation of the divine light; as likewise we are said to see and judge of sensible things in the sun, that is, by the sun’s light.”²¹⁶

To these two principles (“B is” and “B is B”), we can add the law of non-contradiction (B is not \sim B). This is also one of the first principles. This law is stated as “*being is not non-being*.” Further, it asserts that two contradictory things cannot both be true at the same time and in the same manner. This law simply states “one ought not to affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and in the same respect.”²¹⁷ The law of non-contradiction is one of the principles that form the three laws of logic.²¹⁸ Aristotle used the law of non-contradiction as his starting point for knowledge and considered logic as the *οργανον* (organon), or

²¹⁵ James O. Buswell Jr., *A Christian View of Being and Knowing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 8-9.

²¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.12 a.11 ad.3.

²¹⁷ World Evangelical Fellowship. Theological Commission, *Evangelical Review of Theology: Volume 21*, electronic ed. (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Periodicals, 1997), 9.

²¹⁸ (A is A), (A is not \sim A) and (either A or \sim A)

instrument of all science.²¹⁹ It has been stated that the law of identity is the affirmative statement concerning reality and the law of non-contradiction is the negative statement. Leibniz believed that one should say first what a thing is (A is A), before saying that it is not another thing (A is not ~A).

To demonstrate the existence of God by means of first principles we can start with ourselves— I exist, *ego sum* (B is). Rene’ Descartes (1596-1650) made an attempt to ground all knowledge with his famous axiom, “I think, therefore I am,” (*cogito ergo sum*).²²⁰ A better way to formulate this principle is “I am, therefore I think.” This is because **being** precedes **knowing**. Being is foundational; you must exist before you know. Norm Geisler elaborates, “For one could not think unless he existed. Existence is fundamental to everything. Being is the basis for everything.”²²¹ Descartes’s rationalism gets “De carte before de horse.”²²² Existence (ontology) precedes knowledge (epistemology), in fact, ontology grounds epistemology as the *pou stō* of all knowing.²²³ Therefore, we must start with self-existence in order to know that God exists (we will deal with self-knowledge and the knowledge of God at the end of this chapter).

Moving from existence (“I am,” B is), to identity (“I am myself,” B is B), and non-contradiction (“‘to be’ is not ‘not to be,’” B is not ~B) we can add the *Law of the Excluded Middle* (“either ‘to be’ or ‘not to be,’” either B or ~B). This law goes hand-in-hand with the law of non-contradiction. Since “*being is*” and “*being is being*” and its opposite cannot be true, “*being is not non-being*,” there also cannot be anything in between being

²¹⁹ See R. C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas* (Good News Publishers/Crossway Books, Kindle Edition. 2009).

²²⁰ Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, 2nd ed., Baker reference library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 342.

²²¹ Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 250.

²²² *Ibid.*, 196.

²²³ Archimedes, the Greek mathematician, said concerning the lever, “Give me ‘a place where I may stand (ποῦ στῶ)’ and I will move the world.” I borrowed this illustration from Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998). He actually uses it regarding the Bible, which I totally agree, but I am a non-presuppositionist arguing for “a place to stand” to ground the doxa knowledge of God, to move the intellect in a manner of speaking, toward God. Self-knowledge and God-knowledge are intermingled in an *a priori* way, but self-knowledge seems to be logically prior, if not temporally prior, as well.

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and non-being. It is “either/or,” not “both/and.” It is either being or non-being. There cannot be a “some-thing-no-thing.”²²⁴

In our logical march toward the existence of God, we can now add the *Law of Causality* ($\sim B$ cannot cause B) to our three laws of logic.²²⁵ Earlier we provided a demonstration of the principle for efficient causation, which is also a first principle. The law of causality is actually undeniable and self-evident because the subject and predicate are reducible to one another. A cause is what produces an effect and an effect is what has been produced by a cause. The law of causality affirms that non-being cannot cause being because “out of nothing, nothing comes.” Put another way, “that-which-does-not-have-existence” cannot cause existence in another. Aquinas writes, “whatever becomes anew must take its origin from some cause of its becoming, since nothing evolves itself from potentiality to act, or from non-being to being.”²²⁶ Whatever begins to exist has a cause because what comes-to-be moves from potency to act, from non-being to being. It cannot move itself and pick itself up by its own ontological bootstraps; an agent must move upon it. Therefore, whatever begins to exist is dependent and contingent to what is in act.

I am and I came-to-be, but what accounts for my being. Not only did I come-to-be but I will also cease-to-be. What then is responsible for my being? It is certainly not non-being or being whose essence is inferior to mine. As an effect, my cause cannot be subordinate to my being. Furthermore, I must come from being and a particular kind of being. When I look to others, I find that they share the same kind of being as myself. They come-to-be and pass-away in like manner. This is also true of my direct progenitors. My parents are of the exact nature as I am, and their paternities are as they. All human beings, I discover, are dependent and contingent as I am.

As a dependent being, I cannot primarily come from dependent being. An infinite chain of dependent being(s) cannot account for itself. This is the *Law of Contingent Being* (CB cannot cause CB). I am a dependent/contingent being along with all other beings. All that has come-to-be is contingent and dependent. My dependence is evident to me from the time

²²⁴ We do not have space to deal with so-called quantum reasoning which allows for Schrödinger’s “dead/alive” cat. In the real world you cannot have an included middle.

²²⁵ The laws of logic are: the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle.

²²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I. 13.

of self-knowledge and self-awareness. Therefore, my contingency cries out for an answer and the answer leads us to the knowledge of '*the One who is*'. Norm Geisler comments, "It is of my essence that I might not exist even though I do indeed exist. Hence, since it is not of my essence to exist and since it is only of the essence of a Necessary Being to exist, then it follows that we must seek for the ground or cause of every possible being such as I am."²²⁷

THE LAW OF NECESSARY BEING OR THE LAW OF 'THE ONE WHO IS'

All modern scientific evidence points to the fact that the universe came-to-be. The universe was gifted existence a finite time ago. The universe (time, space, matter, energy) is finite, and therefore, contingent and dependent. The universe and all it contains is contingent being (CB). If the universe cannot account for its existence by virtue of its nature (it does not essentially exist), and ultimately, a contingent being cannot account for another contingent being, then, the gift of existence must come from One whose nature is to essentially exist. This is the *Law of Necessary Being* (NB exists and causes CB).

A *Necessary Being* is One who exists "*a se*" (from Himself) and "*per se*" (of Himself). He exists from Himself (from essence) and of Himself (of essence or essentially). This is ontological necessity. By virtue of the nature of a necessary being, whose essence is existence, there can only be One. A necessary being **must** exist. Stated negatively, it is impossible both logically and ontologically for this One not to be. A necessary being is "One who is." It is most fitting that the name by which the God of Scripture revealed Himself is the very name that logic necessitates for the One who explains everything. The name Yahweh or Jehovah literally means "the One who is" or "He who is" (Exodus 3:14). John of Damascus writes, "The most proper of all the names given to God is 'the One who is'.... For he keeps all being in his own embrace, like an infinite and unseen sea of existence."²²⁸

Why is there something rather than nothing, because of '*the One who is*'. There must be One whose nonexistence is impossible in order

²²⁷ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 244.

²²⁸ John of Damascus, *Concerning the Orthodox Faith*, I.9.

for anything of nonexistence to be possible. If there were ever a time of total and complete nothingness, there would still be utter and complete nothingness. This is because “out of nothing, nothing comes” (*ex nihil nihil fit*). For there to ever be something, “Someone” must have always been. This is because it is only “out of something, something comes.”

A necessary being must exist, for an infinite chain of contingent/dependent being cannot account for itself. It is impossible to have an infinite series of causes that extend indefinitely into the past. This is called an infinite regress (an actual infinite chain cannot exist, only a potential infinite can).²²⁹ This is like trying to explain the motion of a train by the addition of more rail cars. This is also like trying to borrow a book from a friend. For example, if I seek to acquire the book *Biblical Inerrancy*, and I go to my friend Scott and ask for it, I can only borrow it if Scott actually has the book. So, I ask Scott if I can borrow the book, and being the nice guy he is (knowing I probably mean “Can I have it?”), he graciously says, “Sure, you can borrow it.” However, he informs me that he must first borrow the book from Chad. Now, Scott asks Chad for the book, *Biblical Inerrancy*, but Chad does not have the book either, he must borrow it too. So, Chad must go to Garth in order to borrow the book from him but Garth must borrow it from Matt, and Matt from Jeremy. Now, this act of borrowing cannot go on forever. Someone must actually own the book before it can be borrowed. This is like existence; I received “being” from my parents but ultimately “being” must be owned, it must be possessed before anyone else can borrow it. Anyone standing on the reception side of existence has been the beneficiary of the grace of ‘*the One who is*’. Out of the sheer act of love and grace, this One has granted the gift of existence to everything that is. This is because only this One essentially has existence. This One “everyone understands to be God.”²³⁰ Finally, because we are personal, loving, rational beings, God must also be personal, loving, and rational—the *Law of Analogy* (CB is similar to NB).

²²⁹ Terence Irwin and Gail Fine write, “Aristotle rejects the possibility of some types of infinite series. He rejects, for instance, any form of argument or *deliberation* that requires an infinite regress of actual steps, and any sort of causal explanation that requires the completion of an infinite series of actual events. See APo 72b7– 11, 84a29– b1, Phys. 256a17– 19, 263a6, Met. ii 2, EN 1094a20–21.” Terence Irwin and Gail Fine, *Aristotle: Selections*. (Hackett Publishing. Kindle Edition), fn. p. 599

²³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.2 a.3 resp.

The “Ego Sum” Argument summarized:

- ✓ *I exist.* **(Being Is)** **—The Law of Existence**
- ✓ *I am myself.* **(Being Is Being)** **—The Law of Identity**
- ✓ *I truly exist, if I deny my existence I prove that I exist. “I am, therefore I think.”*
(Being Is Not Nonbeing) **—The Law of Non-Contradiction**
- ✓ *I exist or I do not exist. I am not in a quantum state between being and nothingness.* **(Either Being or Nonbeing)** **—The Law of the Excluded Middle**
- ✓ *I was gifted existence from another being, but not from being inferior to my being.*
(Nonbeing Cannot Cause Being) **—The Law of (proportionate) Causality**
- ✓ *I was gifted existence from another being. To ultimately account for my existence there cannot be an infinite regress of contingent beings, therefore, I principally received my existence from a Necessary Being.* **(Contingent Being Cannot Cause Contingent Being)** **—The Law of Contingent Being**
- ✓ *I principally received my existence from God, the One necessary and essentially existing being. The most appropriate name for Him is “the One who is.”*
(Necessary Being Exists and is the Cause of Contingent Being) **—The Law of Necessary Being**
- ✓ *I am the effect of a Cause. I am created in the image of this Cause, which is God; therefore, I am like Him.* **(Contingent Being Is Similar to Necessary Being)** **—The Law of Analogy**

The “Ego Sum” Argument²³¹ is founded upon the self-evident nature of the knowledge of personal being. The proposition “I exist” is judged to be self-evidently true on the basis of the intuitive knowledge of personal existence, whereby the subject and predicate are joined. “I exist” is self-evidently known and epistemologically grounded which grounds all other knowledge – ontology precedes epistemology.

²³¹ See Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 250. This is my own abridgement and adaptation of an argument by Dr. Geisler. Any errors or slips of logic are strictly mine.

a u t e r

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

“Our Wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom,” John Calvin writes, “consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other.” Calvin concludes, “the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie.”²³² Calvin understood the connection between our being and God’s being, self-knowledge and the knowledge of God. This connection exists because God is the source and ground of man’s being, for “in Him ... we have our being” (Acts 17:28). Man has been created with an innate sense of God, an inward witness of the Divine—the *sensus divinitatis*. This “mutual tie” is our epistemological ground, that is, our being within God’s being grounds our knowledge of reality. Self-knowledge inextricably leads to the knowledge of God. This is the common ground upon which all mankind stands.

The Christian apologist can use this common ground to communicate the existence of God and the Gospel. This mutual foundation is being itself, along with the principles of logic, as demonstrated above. The laws of logic are innate to us, *a priori*, and confirmed to us, *a posteriori*, they are a part of the intellect’s operating system, which comes preinstalled from the Creator.²³³ Peter Kreeft writes, “Now the knowledge of the principles that are known to us naturally has been implanted in us by God; for God is the Author of our nature.”²³⁴ In utilizing these principles, we are participating in the Divine mind. We can use the light of the Divine Mind to demonstrate the existence of the Divine Mind. In a way, this exhibits the irrationality

²³² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), I, i, 3.

²³³ Aristotle said, “that the first principles are known by immediate experience.” The mind has the capacity to have knowledge “installed” on it through the input of sense experience (a posteriori). The mind was designed by God to operate like a computer. Humans are born with a formatted hard drive with operating system a priori (the *agens intellectus*), with the capable of having knowledge written on it—the ability to know and understand. For a thorough discussion of knowledge, see Etienne Gilson, *Thomistic Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), and *Summa Theologiæ* I. 79 “Of Intellectual Powers,” and Norman Geisler, *Should Old Aquinas Be Forgotten* (Bastion Books, Kindle Edition) chapter six “The First Principles of Knowledge.”

²³⁴ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 39.

of the mind in sin. It is like using the light of the sun to prove that the sun exists or, conversely as atheists attempt to do; to use the light of the Son to prove that the Son does not exist.²³⁵ It is because of this noetic (intellectual) confusion that the necessity of demonstrating God's existence becomes apparent.

The "sensus divinitatis" is so distorted and confused in mankind that a demonstration is needed to introduce sinful man to his Creator. A valuable illustration is seen in the case of Helen Keller. She was blind, deaf, and mute. Since all people are spiritually blind, deaf, and mute, this illustration is very fitting. Due to a childhood illness, Helen Keller became deaf, blind, and mute at a very young age. She was later taught to communicate with hand signals conveyed by touch on the palms of her hands. When she was told about God her answer was very enlightening. She said that she knew God was there but that she did not know His name.²³⁶ Thomas Aquinas expounds the related point, saying, "To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature. . . . This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching."²³⁷ Helen Keller knew "someone was approaching;" she just did not know that it was Jesus approaching. Demonstrating God's existence is really just reinstating the inner knowledge of God while removing all real and imagined obstacles to belief. Apologetics is simply just pre-evangelism. A demonstration of God's existence as part of sharing the Gospel can be used by the Holy Spirit to infuse spiritual life. Therefore, we must be engaged in arguing for the existence of God. The restoration of belief in the existence of God alone only brings doxa knowledge. The Gospel still must be preached in order for the Spirit of God to regenerate and establish the *soteric knowledge* of God to the individual, thus bringing spiritual life.

Arguments for the existence of God only inform us "*that God is*" and not "*who God is*." Aquinas writes, "For just as it is self-evident to us that a whole is greater than its part, so is it most evident to those who see the

²³⁵ Sin is so nefarious that atheists actually try to use the gifts that God has given them to disprove His existence. This seems to be the very definition of madness.

²³⁶ Helen Keller writes, "Mr. Brooks, I have always known about God, but until now I didn't know His name." cited by Harold E. Helms. *God's Final Answer* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2004), 78.

²³⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.2 a.1 ad.1.

very essence of God that God exists, since His essence is His existence. But because we are unable to see His essence, we come to know His existence not in Himself but in His effects.”²³⁸ God’s existence, as stated earlier, would have been self-evident if man had not fallen into sin. But because of sin, the knowledge of God’s existence is confused and darkened. Now, man stands in need of a demonstration. The light of reason can never uncover the essence of God; it can only declare His existence, which is the *doxa knowledge* of God. So, it is through God’s effects that we can know “that He is.” People are God’s effects, and so God can be demonstrated to exist through our being and our self-knowledge. This is the existence of God demonstrated through the light of natural reason, which is available to all people. Our existence and self-knowledge flows to the knowledge of God’s existence. Any knowledge of God’s essence, “who God is,” must come to us by way of revelation, through God’s Word and God’s Spirit. This knowledge is still incomplete, for it is not the *beatific knowledge* awaiting all believers upon glorification in the presence of God.²³⁹ Now that God’s existence, “*that God is*,” has been demonstrated, we will turn our attention to “*who God is*.” The answer to the question, “*what is God like*,” comes to us by way of Scripture.

²³⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I. 21.

²³⁹ The three stages of the knowledge of God: doxa knowledge (all men), soteric knowledge (all believers), and beatific knowledge (glorified saints).

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Subsistence of God— The Tri-Unity of God

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*

– Apostle Paul, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*

*The Christian faith consists above all in the confession of
the holy Trinity.*

– St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Rationibus Fidei*

*[God] is a Triad not only in name and form of speech but
in truth and actuality. For as the Father is the ‘One who
is’ so also is his Word the ‘One who is, God over all’. And
the Holy Spirit is not without existence but exists and has
true being.*

—Athanasius, *Concerning the Holy Spirit*

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRI-UNITY OF GOD²⁴⁰

We worship *one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;*
Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the
Substance [Essence]. For there is one Person of the Father,

²⁴⁰ Tri-unity – “tri-” (three) and “-unus” (one), “trinus” meaning “three in one.” Trinity, “trinus” means “threefold.” Tri-unity is the preferable name for the biblical Godhead but both terms are correct.

another of the Son: and another of the Holy Spirit. But the *Godhead* of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.²⁴¹ —
The Creed of St. Athanasius

The one true and living God,²⁴² *who essentially and eternally exists*, is “one *substance* and three *subsistences*,” or “one *essence* and three *persons*.” The three persons of Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God. The three persons of the Godhead equally and fully participate in the one essence of *God-ness*. There is no distinction in glory, attributes, or perfection between the persons; each person of the Godhead is equally, fully, and truly God. Moreover, there is no divine essence to be spoken of apart from the three persons— Father, Son, and Spirit are the one essence or substance.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are all co-equal, co-eternal, and co-glorious. Each person is “in” the other, and completely reflects the other’s glory and God-ness. The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father. The Spirit is in the Son, and the Son is in the Spirit. The Father is in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the Father. The Son is in both the Spirit and the Father, and the Spirit is in both the Father and the Son. All three persons maintain their distinction through their mutual indwelling and remain one in essence.

The Latin and Greek are very helpful in defining the Tri-Unity of God. God is “mian ousian” (μίαν οὐσίαν), which is “*one ousia*” or “one essence.” The Latin is “unum substantia,” which translated is “one substance.” In Greek God is also spoken of as “treis hypostaseis” (τρεις ὑποστάσεις), which is “three *hypostaseis*” or “three subsistences.” The Greek word prosōpon (προσωπον), “person” is also used in reference to “*hypostaseis*.” The Latin would be “tres substantia,” which means “three subsistences.” The Greek and Latin are particularly illuminating in that there is “one nature (ousia, substance) with three standing under (note the prepositions: “*hypo*” or “*sub*” – under) the nature.”²⁴³ This is the best that language can

²⁴¹ “Confession of Our Christian Faith, Commonly Called the Creed of St. Athanasius,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume VII: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 366.

²⁴² The living God – a God who is able to speak (Deut. 5:26), able to do miracles (Josh. 3:10ff), able to create (Jer. 10:10-13), able to save (1 Tim. 4:10), and is pure act (Ex 3:14); this is in contradistinction to dead and mute idols (Jer. 10:5; Is. 40:9-31).

²⁴³ The Latin is substantia “essence” and substantia “exist under the essence.”

do in communicating the infinite, perfect, eternal, and simple essence of God. Scripture clearly teaches that the one true living God is Father, Son, and Spirit. (See *Godhead in Relationship* - Table 7) In the Trinity, the beauty and mystery of “*the one and the many*” (*unity and diversity*) cohere, coalesce, and converge.

THE TRI-UNITY AND THE NICENE CREED (325 A.D.)

“We believe in one God the Father, Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father (ek tēs ousias tou patros), God from God (theon ek theou), Light from Light, true God from true God (theon alethinon ek theou alēthinou), begotten not created, *of the same essence of the Father* (homoousion tō patri), through whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human. He suffered and the third day he rose, and ascended into the heavens. And he will come to judge both the living and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit. But those who say, Once he was not, or he was not before his generation, or he came to be out of nothing, or who assert that he, the Son of God, is of a different *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or that he is a creature, or changeable, or mutable, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.”²⁴⁴

The Nicene Creed is an important creed regarding the historical outworking of the doctrine of the Trinity. The composers of this creed were very careful to state with accuracy the biblical affirmation of the deity of Christ. The historical backdrop of this creed falls within the timeline of the Church when there was much controversy surrounding the nature of Christ and His relationship to the Father. The council was convened to

²⁴⁴ Cited in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 317-318. The Greek script was deleted in this quote but is present in the text of Reymond. Emphasis and transliterated Greek added.

deal with the various Christological heresies, which denied the full deity of Christ. The importance of this creed is seen in the confirmation that Christ is of the “same essence” (homo-ousia) of the Father and of “the essence (ousia) of the Father” (cf. John 10:38; Hebrews 1:3). This means that Christ’s essence—Godness, is identical with the Father’s essence— Godness (cf. John 10:30). Christ and the Father are the one God (cf. John 1:1). The creed, in reference to Christ, declares that the Son of God is “only begotten ... from the essence of the Father” and confirms that Christ is “true God from true God” (cf. John 1:18; 3:16). The Apostle John declares, “*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, in order that we may know the one who is true, and we are in the one who is true, in his Son **Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life***” (1 John 5:20, emphasis added). The grammar is clear in this text, the demonstrative pronoun “this one” refers to “Jesus Christ” and confesses that He is the “true God,” along with the Father. Concerning the phrase “only begotten” in the creed, Benjamin Warfield writes, “The adjective ‘only begotten’ conveys the idea, not of derivation and subordination, but of uniqueness and consubstantiality: Jesus is all that God is, and He alone is this.”²⁴⁵ Historically, Nicene Christology was the established position of the Church by which Trinitarian orthodoxy was formed and measured. It goes without saying that this was also the reflection of biblical Christology attained through scriptural exegesis.

MONOTHEISM

The biblical record, both Old and New Testament, is very clear concerning the affirmation of monotheism— there is only one true and living God (Jeremiah 10:10). From the “Shema Israel” of Deuteronomy 6:4, to the proclamation of the “Great Commandment” by Christ in Mark 12:29, the oneness and unity of God are the principal message of Scripture. As it is written, “*You believe that God is one; you do well*” (James 2:19). This monotheistic message, “*God is one,*” is taught and defended by Christ and His apostles. The New Testament writings, inspired by the Spirit of truth and pre-authenticated by Christ Himself (John 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6), reveal the specific manner in which “God is one.”

²⁴⁵ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Biblical Doctrines*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 194.

Within the context and rich heritage of Hebraic monotheism, Christ began his temporal and dimensional function of revealing the God of the Old Covenant Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus Christ, the *Logos of God* has always been the expression, communication, and revelation of the invisible and immortal God (cf. John 1:18; John 14:8-11; 1 Timothy 6:16). As a man's word (*logos*) is the expression of his unseen mind, so the Word (*Logos*) of God has always been the expression of the invisible God. It is in the concept of the "Word, Logos" (John 1:1-18) that we come to understand the ontological relationship of the Godhead.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE LOGOS

“ο λογος του Θεου” – “*o logos tou theou*” (Revelation 19:13)

In the history of philosophical thought there is no other term like the word “λογος, logos.”²⁴⁶ Just as the knowledge of being is an expression of being, so language is also an expression of knowledge. Within the concept of “logos” there is a threefold consideration regarding the knowledge of reality. It is “being,” what is it; “knowing,” how do you know it; and “communication,” how do you communicate it? This is the reason why the word “logos” is the suffix of lexicalities that denote the knowledge of an aspect of being. The concept of “logos” was used by the Apostle John to explain the nature, person, and coming of Christ into the world. It is within the historical context and functioning of this term, philosophically, that we can come to better understand John's use of the expression “the logos.” The term “logos” has a rich history and was not used by the author of Scripture in a conceptual void. The word “logos” functioned in various ways for hundreds of years before John used it in the Prologue to his gospel.

The word “logos” means objective order, or intelligible reality. It has reference to reason, logic, intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, or science. The word in its basic usage means word, language, or communication. The principle of the “logos,” as it functioned in pre-Socratic philosophy, referred to the *unity* in all the *diversity* of reality. Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, pursued the rationale behind the enigma of “unity

²⁴⁶ For an excellent treatment of the historical meaning of the term Logos see, Seokil Yoon, “*The Meaning of the LOGOS in John 1:1-18*” (2008). *Masters Theses*. Paper 76, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/masters/76>

in diversity,” or “the one and the many.” He noted all the change and flux in the world and sought for the unifying principle of all the motion and change. Heraclitus assumed that the universe was composed of fire, since fire is always moving, tumultuous, and constantly fluctuating.²⁴⁷ He sought the ground of “being” in view of all the “becoming” he observed. As a consequence, Heraclitus postulated a universal law or principle, which guides and directs the change. It was that which gave cosmos to the chaos. It brought coherence, order, and purpose to the motion of becoming. It animated everything as its unifying grounding principle. Heraclitus called this principle, “the Logos.” It was the Logos that he identified as the ruling principle of the world. For Heraclitus, the Logos was an impersonal designation for God or the “One.”

For Stoicism, the Logos was pure fire, which gave heat, light, and life to the universe. The Stoics referred to the Logos as the irresistible force that bears the entire world and all creatures to a common end. The Logos was a holy inescapable law that nothing could retract itself from and, moreover, every rational man should obey.²⁴⁸ The Stoics borrowed from Heraclitus, and accordingly, understood the Logos in its cosmic, divine role. “In Stoicism, *logos* once again played a cosmological role. ... For the Stoics, *logos*, God, and nature were in reality one ... *logos* was the rational element that pervades the controls all of the universe.”²⁴⁹ K. Scott Oliphint further explains,

Heraclitus ... acknowledged that there is a “law,” a *logos*, that does not change ... in his view [there was] a close correlation between the *logos* and the universal, animating fire. By the time we come to the Stoics, there is an identity between the original, animating, universal fire and the *logos*. The *logos* was thought by the Stoics to be a wisdom or a reason or an intelligence that guides and steers the

²⁴⁷ This “motion” was also seen in **water**, **air**, and **earth**; all candidates, including **fire**, for “*the Archē*”—the ruling substance of which all things are made. The quest of the earliest western philosophers was concerned with the three-fold search for: the *Archē* (the ruling substance), *Unity in Diversity* (the one and the many), and *Cosmos over Chaos* (symphony out of cacophony).

²⁴⁸ See Cleanthus, “*Hymn to Zeus*”

²⁴⁹ Thomas H. Tobin, “*Logos*,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 349.

events of this life. It was the logos that was the rationale for Stoic “providence,” what some have called “fate.”²⁵⁰

It was within the context of the Greek mystery religions that the notion of the Logos was first used religiously. The god Hermes was referred to as “the logos of god” and “the son of god” within Greek mythology. In this system, Hermes was considered “the logos of Zeus” because he functioned as the chief spokesmen or messenger of the gods. It was within this religious environment that the people of Lystra had mistaken the Apostle Paul for Hermes and sought to sacrifice to him. Acts 14:12 records that the people of Lystra were “...calling Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, because he (Paul) was the principal speaker.” According to legend, Hermes was the one who brought salvation because he was the mediator and revealer of the will of the gods. (In Neo-Platonism, the Logos was the intermediate by which the transcendent God also created and governed the world). In the context of mediation, “the logos of god” was also known as “the son of god,” and so, the father-son relationship was further developed. Not only this, but the Logos began to be understood as the image of God and in turn, man was understood to be the image of the Logos.

Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher (20BC–AD50), developed a syncretic and comprehensive system employing the philosophical principle of the Logos. In Philo’s system there was a synthesis of Hebrew and Greek thought. He attempted to explain Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy. He accomplished this with a Jewish/Hellenistic synthesis, which introduced the Stoic concept of the Logos into Old Testament theology. Philo utilized a two-fold cosmological function of the Logos. Philo called these two aspects of the Logos, the *creative power* and the *ruling power*. Philo connected the creative power with the term “θεος, theos” (Heb. *Elohim* – God) and the ruling power with “κυριος, kyrios” (Heb. $Y_{(a)}HW_{(e)}H$ – LORD; Adonai

²⁵⁰ William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present (Volume 1, To 1500): A Primary Source Reader* (Wheaton: Il. Crossway Publishers, 2009), 39.

– Lord) in the Septuagint (LXX).²⁵¹ In Philo’s Greek/Hebrew synthesis the Logos is signified in various ways:

- (1) As the Creative Word of God²⁵²
- (2) The Revealer of God, as the Angel of the LORD²⁵³
- (3) The Divine Mind, the (Platonic) Form [Idea] of Forms [of Ideas], Wisdom of God, and the Reason of God²⁵⁴
- (4) The Foundation of the Universe and the Power that Upholds the World. Philo writes, “The Word [Logos] of the living God being the *bond of every thing*, as has been said before, *holds all things together*, and *binds all the parts*, and prevents them from being loosened or separated”²⁵⁵
- (5) The Intermediary between God and creation, through the Logos God created the universe and administrates it²⁵⁶
- (6) The Logos is God²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ In most English Bible’s the personal or covenant name of God, “YHWH” is translated as “LORD,” and the Hebrew word that refers to the sovereignty or kingship of God, “Adonai, which means “master, ruler, sovereign or lord,” is translated as “Lord.” The Hebrew word “El” or “Elohim,” which refers to the office or position of God is translated as “God.” Illustrated, it may be understood as in, “Who is the president (position, office) of the US? It is Barak Obama (personal name); “God” refers to the office and “LORD” refers to the one who truly is God or the creator, which is his personal name— Yahweh or Jesus Christ. The manner in which the terms for God were translated from Hebrew to Greek in the LXX is very important. The words “El” or “Elohim” (God) were translated with the Greek word, “Theos,” and the personal name of God, “YHWH” and the word “Adonai” were translated with the single word, “kyrios.” This is important because Christ is called “Kyrios” on almost every page of the NT, thus revealing his true nature within the context of Hellenism!

²⁵² *On the Creation of the World* 13, [All references to Philo’s writings are from Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995)]

²⁵³ *On Dreams* 1.228-239; *On Flight and Finding* 5; *Who is the Heir of Divine Things* 201-205; *Genesis* 16:7-8, 13; 22:15-18; 31:11,13; *Judges* 2:1 (the Angel of the LORD is identified as Yahweh Himself in Scripture).

²⁵⁴ *Migration* 103; *On the Creation of the World* 24-25; “the wisdom of God is the Word of God” (Alleg. Interp. I 65)

²⁵⁵ *On Flight and Finding* 112; *Works of Philo*, 331 [emphasis added]; *The Planting of Noah* 8-10

²⁵⁶ *On the Cherubim* 125

²⁵⁷ *On Dreams* 1.229–230; *Allegorical Interpretation*, III 207

Along with these descriptions, Philo also designates the Logos as “the chief of the angels” and the “high priest” of the cosmos.²⁵⁸ It was in this rich philosophical context and cultural milieu that the Apostle John employed the term Logos for Jesus Christ. But this is not to suggest that John used it with the intention of applying all of its pagan meanings.

The concept of the Logos became an essential tool in the hands of the early Christians, as they continually defended their faith and worship of Jesus Christ. This was especially true given the fact that Christianity arose in the context of Jewish monotheism. The writings of Christ’s apostles (the New Testament), the writings of the disciples of Christ’s apostles (the Apostolic Fathers), and their contemporaries are full of references to the deity of Christ, the Logos of God and the three-fold Trinitarian formula— “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” It was the second century Apologists, along with the Ante-Nicene Fathers that laid the foundation for the historic doctrine of the Trinity. Through biblical exegesis and reason they recognized the real distinction of “persons” in the nature of the one God. The writings of the early Church Fathers, the baptismal liturgy, the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) and the custom of the Church all reveal the fact that the Father, Logos, and Spirit were all worshiped as the one God. This is an undeniable fact of the early Christian Church; from the foundation of the Church, Christ was worshiped and recognized as God. But in the mist of heavy persecution, the Church did not immediately work out the biblical doctrine of one God in three persons. It was not until the threat of the Monarchian heresy that the Church attempted to define in a comprehensive manner the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS AND THE TRINITY—“CHRIST OUR GOD” (30-110AD)

“ἡσους χριστου του θεου ημων” – “iēsou christou tou
theou ēmōn” (IEph., Sal., Ignatius)

The concept of the Tri-unity of God is implicitly taught throughout all of Scripture. The veracity of the Trinitarian notion of God— one God who is Father, Son, and Spirit— is beyond all reasonable and biblical doubt. It is

²⁵⁸ *On Flight and Finding* 108

the most defensible of any Scriptural doctrine. The biblical evidence for the deity of Christ, and subsequently, the Tri-unity of God is overwhelming. It is very significant that those who were disciples of the New Testament authors also referred to Christ as “God” and used the triune formula in reference to the one true God they worshipped. The Apostolic Fathers left the Church a wealth of material that establishes the fact that the earliest Christian confession was that Christ is God. The fact that Scripture teaches that Christ is both Lord and God, is distinct from God the Father, and yet there is only one God stands as the core and foundation of Trinitarianism.

Ignatius of Antioch (30-107AD), who was a disciple of the Apostle John and Clement of Rome (30-100AD), a successor and colleague of the Apostle Peter, stand as two of the most important witnesses regarding the deity of Christ. Ignatius, on various occasions, refers to Christ as “God” and Clement makes use of the Trinitarian formula in reference to the divine nature. Tradition holds that Ignatius was the child that Jesus took in his arms in Mark 9:36-37, and most likely, because of this was known by the name Theophoros (ἰγνατίος ὁ θεοφορος, Ignatios o Theophoros).²⁵⁹ Ignatius writes, “Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the church at Ephesus in Asia.”²⁶⁰ The alias by which Ignatius is known means “the God-bearer,” which possibly refers to his faithfulness to serve Christ, who is God or “the one (*who was*) carried by God,” thus referring to the identity of the one who held him as a child, who is Christ. Either interpretation recognizes the fact that Ignatius held to the deity of Christ and was also one who was in contact with the Apostle John. What is also significant is that Ignatius and John lived as contemporaries and died within years of each other.

Clement of Rome is most likely the same Clement of whom the Apostle Paul refers to in Philippians 4:3.²⁶¹ It is also the tradition of the Church that the Apostle Peter was the one who consecrated Clement to the Gospel ministry. Again, it is noteworthy that both of these men held, in embryonic

²⁵⁹ “And he took a young child and had him stand among them. And taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of the young children such as these in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me, but the one who sent me”” (Mark 9:36–37).

²⁶⁰ I Eph., Sal., Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 137.

²⁶¹ “Yes, I ask also you, true yokefellow, help them, who struggled along with me in the gospel with both Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life” (Philippians 4:3).

form, to the doctrine of the Tri-unity of God. Clement writes from Rome to the Corinthian Church (c. 95 AD), “Do we not have *one God* and *one Christ* and *one Spirit* of grace which was poured out upon us” (I Clement 46.6).²⁶² Clement also writes giving all three persons equal importance, “For God lives and the Lord Jesus Christ lives and the Holy Spirit— which is both faith and the hope of the elect.”²⁶³ In this passage, it is stated that all three persons are equally the object of the “elect’s” faith and hope.

It was Ignatius, “Theophoros,” in his ecclesiastical writing, which gives us the most explicit claims for the deity of Christ. Ignatius used both “θεος, Theos” in reference to Christ and the Trinitarian formula, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” in reference to God in his epistles. In his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius clearly calls Christ, God; he refers to the Father’s plan of sending His Son, who is both of man and of God, and he refers to the Holy Spirit’s work in the incarnation of Christ. He writes, “For *our God, Jesus the Christ*, was conceived by Mary according to *God’s plan*, both from the seed of David [*human*] and of the *Holy Spirit [divine]*.”²⁶⁴ This passage alone has most of the elements of orthodox Christianity in one simple sentence. The theological astuteness of Ignatius of Antioch is remarkable. The man, who knew the man, who walked with Christ, understood the human and divine nature of Christ, who was just as much God as the Father, and who came according to God’s plan through the Holy Spirit. The Christian Faith has remained the same as it was “*once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3). Ignatius, additionally, exhorts the Church to prosper in faith and love by the Triune God. He writes, “Be eager, therefore, to be firmly grounded in the precepts of the Lord and the apostles, in order that ‘in whatever you do, you may prosper,’ physically and spiritually, in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and in the Spirit.”²⁶⁵

²⁶² Clement, Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 81. Emphasis added.

²⁶³ My translation of I Clement 58.2, ζῆν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς καὶ ζῆν ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἢ τε πίστις καὶ ἢ ἐλπίς τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν from Michael William Holmes, “*The Apostolic Fathers in Greek*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 94.

²⁶⁴ Ignatius, I Eph 18.2, Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 149.

²⁶⁵ Ignatius, I Mag 13.1, Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 157. It might also be noted that Ignatius is quoting Psalm 1:3, which is a Psalm exhorting the Believer to meditate on God’s Word. Ignatius seems here to be clearly equating,

Ignatius also employs the concept of the “Logos” in his letter to the Church at Magnesia. He writes, Christ, “being begotten by the Father before the beginning of time, was *God the Word [Logos]*, the only-begotten Son, and remains the same for ever.”²⁶⁶ Again, Ignatius introduces budding theological issues that were later expanded and explained in Trinitarian developments. His concept of Christ “being begotten ... before the beginning of time” was later explained as the “eternal sonship” of Christ. In later descriptions, Christ is understood as being “eternally generated” from the essence of the Father and is of the “same essence” (*homoousia*) as the Father. As the Nicene Creed states, Christ was “begotten not created” and “of the same essence of the Father.” The doctrine of the “eternal generation” of the Son (begotten, not created and the confession that “there was never a time when the Son was not”) was later orthodoxy. Trinitarianism confesses that the Son is eternally generated from the essence of the Father and the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (*filioque*),²⁶⁷ this is the wording of Nicaea. This language definitely had Platonic roots, as the early Christians were great philosophers. Greek philosophy gave the Church a vocabulary and philosophical structure in order to speak of God. Plato himself, through general revelation, knew “that God is” and he spoke truthfully, in many areas, concerning *‘the One who is’*. The God of the philosophers is a small slice of the God of Abraham. As, the *doxa* knowledge of the God of Abraham is knowable through the light of reason— the Logos speaking through logos.

There has been much debate over the etymology and meaning of the Greek words translated “begotten” and “only-begotten,” and whether or

“the precepts of the Lord and the apostles” (the Gospels and the Apostle’s letters) with OT Scripture. If this is the case then it is clear that the first generation of Christians knew that the Apostle’s writings were Scripture, and therefore, they would have cared for them and collected them as Scripture. Today many are saying that the NT writings were not identified as Scripture until much later in Church history.

²⁶⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians 6,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 61.

²⁶⁷ The addition of the clause “from the Son” (*filioque* clause) was later added to the Nicene Creed and caused much controversy between the Eastern and Western Church. If these designations are right at all, it seems that the Spirit is also “from the Son.” But the issue was that the Western Church added it without consulting the Eastern Church.

not the concept of the “eternal begetting” of the Son is the best language to use in reference to the Trinity. The concept of “eternal generation” seeks to explain the internal relating of the immanent Trinity. Due to the scope of this work, it is outside our purview to deal with these issues extensively. However, the concept of the Logos was more than sufficient for the early Church and it set the stage for Trinitarian orthodoxy. Furthermore, the concept of the Logos was a powerful tool in the hands of the early Church Apologist and it took center stage in the defense of the Christian Faith and the vindication of the deity of Christ, thus leading to the tri-unity of God.²⁶⁸

THE APOLOGISTS AND THE TRINITY— “THE LOGOS WAS GOD” (110-200AD)

“Θεος ην ο λογος” – “*theos ēn o logos*” (John 1:1)

In the providence of God, the discipline of Apologetics arose in the second century. It began as a means of offering a critical response to the heresies and challenges of the early Church (1 Peter 3:15). In the history of theological progress, it was always the presence of error that caused the Church to develop, define, and defend its doctrinal commitments. The first heresies to arise were gnostic in character and challenged the foundation of all doctrine— the nature of Christ and God. It was no accident that this doctrine was the first to be dealt with by the Church, for the doctrine of God carries eternal consequences. This is because the preaching of faith in a mere creature, or even secondary god, called “Jesus” has zero efficacy. The Apostle Paul warned of those who would preach “another Jesus” (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:4). The Jesus of Scripture is the **Logos of God**, who is

²⁶⁸ Presently, this author is leaning toward the view that the term “Son” is not necessarily an ontological word, which explains the internal relationship of the immanent Trinity, but is a prophetic term connected to the incarnation of Christ (Psalm 2). It seems that “Logos” is the biblical term used for Christ in His pre-existence and as long as sonship is interpreted as, “expressing,” “revealing,” and “equal in essence with the Father,” as sharing in the same understanding as “logos,” it should be sufficient. Dr. Walter Martin was an expert in the writings of the early Church Fathers and held the aforementioned view. But, this author is not ready to be dogmatic either way and is still researching the issue. The doctrine of the “eternal generation” of the Son, properly and carefully explained, is certainly correct as long as it is protected from a Neo-Platonist understanding.

God Himself; He alone can be the true mediator between God and man, because He is truly both God and man.

It was the term “Logos” that served the Church well in meeting the challenges of the second century. The Holy Spirit of God inspired the Apostle John to utilize the phrase Logos in reference to the pre-incarnate Christ. The Logos doctrine of John’s Prologue was suitable to answer the numerous challenges to the Christian Faith and the Apologists yielded its sword well. The Logos doctrine was used to safeguard the importance of the distinction of persons in the Godhead. The real relations²⁶⁹ in the one God are essential truths of Trinitarianism. It is truly a “one and the many,” a real “unity in diversity” and these heresies challenged the biblical truth of the Tri-unity of God. Francis Hall comments on the importance of the term “logos.”

St. John had appropriated the term Logos in the prologue of his Gospel as a suitable name of the Son of God—suitable to connote the eternal and mediatorial aspects of His Person. This Logos was declared to be eternal, distinct from God the Father, and Himself God, the Agent of creation, the Life and the Light of men, who became flesh and dwelt among us, revealing Himself to be the only-begotten Son of God. It was the task of the second-century apologists to develop the Christian implications of this term, as affording an antidote of gnostic and other pagan speculations.²⁷⁰

Our brief survey of the second century Christian Apologists will focus on their use of the term Logos in reference to the distinction of persons in God. For the Logos is distinct from the Father and yet designated as God. This reality necessitated the development, language, and understanding that in the nature of God there is a certain kind of unity, a unity in diversity.

Theophilus of Antioch (115-181AD) spoke of Christ as the Logos, *who was God* and the Logos, *who was begotten of God*. This language offered distinction with co-equality in the nature of the one God. This

²⁶⁹ Aquinas writes, “It ought to be said that relations exist in God really.” *Summa Theologica* 1.28.1

²⁷⁰ Francis J. Hall, *The Trinity, Dogmatic Theology* (London; New York; Bombay; Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 58.

understanding is definitely Ignatian as the “generation” of the Logos from the essence of the Father is in view. He writes of Christ as being, “The Word [Logos] ... being God, and being begotten from God...”²⁷¹ Hans Svebakken speaks of his insight and writes,

Theophilus’s Trinitarian thought reflects in general the fluidity of ante-Nicene doctrine. God is ultimately beyond description, but the names Logos [Word], Sophia [Wisdom] and Spirit may be used to refer to various aspects of God’s being, with “Father” being the most comprehensive title. He is the first to use *trias* “Triad” in reference to God.²⁷²

This understanding of a “three-in-unity” comes to bear very early in the Church. The idea of “distinction-in-unity” in God, which is solely limited to the persons of the Father, the Son (Logos, Wisdom) and the Spirit, was understood by the Church since its inception. This is the case, because the Apologists were good students of the New Testament.

The prince of the second century Apologists was Justin Martyr (110-165AD). He was the first Christian philosopher and the first Christian to extensively utilize the principle of the Logos with all of its theoretical underpinnings. Justin converted to Christianity after studying numerous philosophical systems and finding them wanting. It was the rationality of Christianity that caused him to embrace the Faith. He said concerning his conversion, “...straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me.... I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus, and for this reason, I am a philosopher.”²⁷³ Justin considered the Christian Faith the answer to all his philosophical striving. In the Logos alone, life has

²⁷¹ Theophilus of Antioch, “Theophilus to Autolycus,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 103 - Theoph., Autol. 2.22

²⁷² Hans Svebakken, “Theophilus of Antioch,” ed. Trevor A. Hart, *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2000), 542.

²⁷³ Justin Martyr, “*Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew 8*,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 198.

coherence, meaning, and purpose and the longings of the human heart are fulfilled. He saw in Christianity the greatest validity of any philosophy. He writes in his *Second Apology*,

Our doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul. For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word [Logos]. But since they did not know the whole of the Word [Logos], which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves.²⁷⁴

Michael Slusser writes of the importance of Justin Martyr.

He is most famous for defending the worship of Jesus Christ by identifying him with the divine Logos, who animates the universe and holds it together, and who makes human beings rational by sowing in them a share in himself [this is Justin's concept of the *logos spermatikos*, the seed of the Logos in every person].²⁷⁵

Following are the various statements of Justin concerning Christ, the Logos.

- (1) The Logos is God “the [Logos] Word... *He is divine*”²⁷⁶ and “... being the first-begotten Word [Logos] of God, *is even God*.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Justin Martyr, “*The Second Apology of Justin*,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 191.

²⁷⁵ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999–2003), 100.

²⁷⁶ Justin Martyr, “*The First Apology of Justin* 10,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 166.

²⁷⁷ Justin Martyr, “*The First Apology of Justin* 63,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 184.

- (2) The Logos is distinct from the Father and inseparable from Him “the Father of the universe has a *Son*”²⁷⁸ and “they call Him the Word [Logos], because He carries tidings from the Father to men: but maintain that this power is *indivisible and inseparable from the Father*, just as they say that the light of the sun on earth is *indivisible and inseparable* from the sun in the heavens.”²⁷⁹
- (3) The Logos is the expression, revealer, and mediator of the Father “...because He *carries tidings* from the Father to men...”²⁸⁰ and “Jesus the Christ is *the Son of God* and *His Apostle*, being of old the Word [Logos], and appearing sometimes in the form of fire, and sometimes in the likeness of angels; but now, by the will of God, *having become man* for the human race.”²⁸¹
- (4) The Logos is the Creator “by the word [Logos] of God *the whole world was made*”²⁸² and “knowing that God conceived and *made the world* by the Word [Logos].”^{283, 284}

Within the context of the Logos doctrine, which was so eloquently defined and defended by the Apologists, the various Trinitarian heresies developed. It was thought by the heretics that the distinction in person

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 184 (*First Apology*, 63)

²⁷⁹ Justin Martyr, “*Dialogue of Justin with Trypho* 128, a Jew,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 264.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 264 (*Trypho*, 128)

²⁸¹ Justin Martyr, “*The First Apology of Justin* 63,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 184.

²⁸² Ibid., 182 (*First Apology*, 59)

²⁸³ Ibid., 185 (*First Apology*, 64)

²⁸⁴ There are other early Apologists, which spoke of the deity of the Logos and were forerunners of Trinitarianism: **Irenaeus** (120AD-202) disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John. Against Heresies 2.2.4–5. **Tertullian** (145-220AD), Against Praxeas 2; Against Praxeas 3. **Clement of Alexandria** (153-217AD), Exhortation to the Heathen 10; The Instructor 1.8. **Origen** (185-254AD), First Principles 4.1.28; Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.2; First Principles 1.1.8; First Principles 1.3.2; First Principles 4.1.28. **Cyprian** (200-258AD) “The Lord says, ‘I and the Father are one;’^(John 10:30) and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, ‘And these three are one.’”^(1 John 5:7), On the Unity of the Church 6

that the Logos doctrine provided destroyed the unity of God. William G. Rusch explains,

During the third century a backlash against the Logos doctrine occurred in the Western church. It was a movement based largely on a fear that the Logos theology endangered the unity of God. Because this reaction wished to accentuate that God was an absolute monad without distinctions within the unity, it became known as monarchianism.²⁸⁵

HISTORICAL CONTROVERSIES AND THE TRINITY

The historic controversies surrounding the nature of Christ and His relationship to the Father, in reaction to the Logos doctrine, followed a monarchical formulation. It generally involved an affirmation of God the Father, while denying the co-equality and consubstantiality of the Son and Spirit. This view usually relegated to Christ the status of secondary deity, angelic substance, or ordinary creatureliness; and it attributed mere influence or power to the Spirit, who was an impersonal force.

Dynamic Monarchianism or Adoptionism

The Dynamic Monarchian view of God holds to a strict monotheism, which means “one ruler” or one unitary God. It holds the unity of God in “oneness of nature” and “oneness of person.” The Son and Holy Spirit are consubstantial with the Father but as impersonal characteristics of the Divine essence. This view attempts to safeguard monotheism at the expense of New Testament revelation. It explains the man Jesus Christ as just a man, not God, who the Divine Logos came upon at his baptism, thus making Jesus the “son” of God. The term *adoptionism* reflects the method of how Jesus became the Christ at his baptism and once the man Jesus was crucified, the Divine Logos left him.

²⁸⁵ William G. Rusch, *Trinitarian Controversy—Sources of Early Christian Thought*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 1980), 6

Modalistic Monarchianism or Sabellianism

A man by the name of Sabellius (condemned 262 AD) developed a doctrine of the Godhead called Modalistic Monarchianism in its complete and sophisticated form. Modalism was an attempt to adhere to a strict monotheism, while answering the question as to why the Church worshiped Jesus Christ. Modalism views the unity of God as absolute. He is qualitatively characterized in His essence by “one nature” and “one person” but this essence may be designated interchangeably as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These designations are different descriptions for God and are identical with the absolute one unitary existence. The three names designate the three modes by which God reveals Himself to His creation. Sabellius considered Jesus to be merely a different form of the one God, a kind of temporary or temporal revelatory mode. The name modalism explains the method of revelation. God plays the actor in His modalistic portrayals of Father, Son and Spirit. Today, United Pentecostals and Apostolics are modalists who deny the Trinity. Modalism attempts to affirm biblical doctrine by honoring the three names given for God, but it is an absolute denial of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Arianism or Subordinationism

Arianism is the teaching of the Alexandrian presbyter Arius (circa. 280–336). Arianism (condemned in 325 AD) attempted to avoid idolatry and confirm monotheism at the expense of the biblical revelation concerning the deity of Christ. Arius taught that God created a rational spirit creature called the “Logos.” At the incarnation, the created Logos assumed bodily form. Arius denied not only Christ’s deity but also Christ’s true humanity. Arius believed that “God alone is God... God is unbegotten, eternal, and without beginning or change. Christ is distinct from God, created out of nothing by the will of God, not eternal, yet created before all time or the world; in spite of his creaturehood, he is the world’s mediator and redeemer.”²⁸⁶ Arius found his theological counterpart in Athanasius.

²⁸⁶ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 1, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 121. Arius cited Prov. 8:22 as a biblical proof of Christ’s creaturely nature. Dr. Walter Martin pointed out (*Hermeneutics*: audio Bible class) that Proverbs 8 is commonly used by

Athanasius (circa. 297–373) became archbishop of Alexandria in 328 A.D. Athanasius stood against Arius on behalf of the biblical truth concerning Christ’s divine status. He insisted on the full divinity of Christ in scriptural and rational terms. He commonly quoted the sacramental liturgy of baptism into the “name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) as an argument against the Son and Spirit being mere creatures or *subordinate* deities. The biblical baptismal formula equates all three persons in dignity and importance. It also demonstrates the cooperative work of all *Three* in the salvation of individuals. John Feinberg further relates the reasoning behind this argument.

Others have noted that Jesus commands that new disciples be baptized in the name of all three (Matt 28:19). The verse’s grammatical construction links the three [Father, Son, Holy Spirit] together as three coordinate nouns by using the word *kai* [“and”] between each of the three nouns. The argument is essentially that converts are to be baptized in the name of each because each is *fully and equally God*. If one or more were of lesser worth or dignity, we might expect the baptismal formula to refer only to the greatest.²⁸⁷

The Athanasian Creed reflects a developed and mature Trinitarian theology that was constructed upon the Matthewian baptismal formula. The creed reflects Athanasius’ view of the full divinity of Christ within the co-equal, co-eternal Trinity in perfect unity. He confirmed the deity of all three persons in the unity of one substance. Charles Ryrie writes concerning the issues involved before Nicene and Athanasius,

Athanasius and his followers wanted it stated that the Son was of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father, while a large group of moderates suggested that the word

the cults (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses) to teach a heretical Christology. He also noted that Orthodox Christians mistakenly use this text as well in their Christology. Dr. Martin noted that this text is simply the personification of wisdom—nothing more, nothing less.

²⁸⁷ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 468. Emphasis added.

homoiousios (“of similar substance”) be substituted.... Arians said that the Son was of a different substance (*heteroousios*).... The clear and unequivocal statement of the Nicene Creed [states] that Christ was of the same substance with the Father (*homoousios*).²⁸⁸

The two phrases, “same substance,” and “like substance,” are only distinguished by the use of one Greek letter, the letter “i,” which is called “iota.” In the debate over whether Christ is of the “same substance,” *hom α ousios* or of “like substance,” *hom ι ousios* with the Father the use of the Greek vowel *iota* (i) which forms the diphthong (oi) does make an “iota” of a difference. It makes an “iota” of eternal significance, for the Son is the very image of the Father’s “essence” (υποστασεως, hypostaseōs²⁸⁹ Hebrews 1:3, LEB) and He is the very “form of God,” (μορφη θεου, morphē theou; Philippians 2:6). The identity of the one who died for the world’s sin is of essential importance. This is because a mere creature or even a subordinate deity could never atone for another’s sin. As it is written, “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Hebrews 10:4, ESV). Such a finite being could possibly atone for its own sin in the payment of a ransom. In the context of Hebrews 1 and Philippians 2, the affirmation of the deity of Christ is connected with the proclamation of His atoning sacrifice.²⁹⁰

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE TRINITY

“The doctrine of the Trinity,” Donald Bloesch writes, “does not contradict Hebraic monotheism but deepens and enriches it.... This one Supreme Being, however, is not a solitary unity but a composite unity. He

²⁸⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 65.

²⁸⁹ *Hypostasis* and *ousia* are two Greek words that are translated as “essence.” It may be best to think of *ousia* as referring to Aristotle’s secondary-substance (the nature of something considered universally, as in *humanness*) and *hypostasis* as referring to his use of a primary-substance (the nature of an individual considered in itself). In this context “hypostasis” would mean that Christ is not the same person as the Father but from the essence of the Father, the God-ness of the Father. These distinctions are dealt with under the headings “Defining Essence” and “Predication.”

²⁹⁰ See Anselm’s “*Why the God Man*.”

is not monochrome but multichrome.²⁹¹ There are three essential, biblical truths concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.

- (1) There is one God (μὴν οὐσίαν, *mian ousian*: one essence);
- (2) The Father, Son, and Spirit are all identified as the one God (τρεις υποστάσεις, *treis hypostaseis*: three existing under the essence) and
- (3) There is a mutual indwelling of the three persons called *perichōrēsis*, περιχώρησις.

Lewis Sperry Chafer writes, “The foundational truth of all Scripture is the fact that God is one God who subsists in three Persons.”²⁹²

One Substance (substantia)

The Scripture is very clear in its assertion of monotheism. The Bible teaches that there is only one true and living God. No other Scriptural truth, particularly in the Old Testament, receives more prominence than the confession that “*there is no God besides Yahweh*” (cf. Isaiah 45:21-22). Within the context of Old Testament Judaism, the Shema of Israel was held to be the most important confession of faith, even the greatest commandment (cf. Mark 12:29). It is “*Sh’ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad,*” which is traditionally translated “*Hear Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.*” In the English Old Testament it states, “*Hear, Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one*” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Throughout the Old Testament it is declared that there is only one true and living God, and that there is no one besides him. “*I am Yahweh, and there is none besides me; besides me there is no god. I gird you though you do not know me, so that they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none besides me; I am Yahweh and there is none besides me*” (Isaiah 45:5–6). The uniqueness and distinctiveness of God is displayed in His ability to foreknow and determine the future. His sovereignty is unchallenged and is not shared by another. “*Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like*

²⁹¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *God, the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 184.

²⁹² Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. 95, *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 95, 380 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1938), 399.

Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:9–10, NKJV).

The New Testament is equally emphatic concerning monotheism, it declares, "there is no God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4). The Lord Jesus also emphasized the Shema of Israel. After being asked about the greatest commandment, He responded, "*The most important is, 'Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and from your whole soul and from your whole mind and from your whole strength'" (Mark 12:29–30). The Lord Jesus stressed the fact that there is only one God. He says, "How are you able to believe, if you accept glory from one another, and do not seek the glory which is from the only God" (John 5:44). The Greek phrase is του μονου θεου (tou monou theou). The word μονος (monos) means "the only entity in a class."²⁹³ It emphasizes uniqueness and oneness. There is only one unique God. God is God alone and there is no other. He is the only true God. This makes the approval one seeks more meaningful. The oneness and uniqueness of God is a universal truth that also transcends the earthly realm. It is known to all sentient beings. "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). The Greek phrase is εις εστιν ο θεος (eis estin o theos). The word "one" here is εις (eis); it is a cardinal number and means "that which is united as one in contrast with being divided or consisting of separate parts."²⁹⁴ The word is also emphatic in the Greek text, it reads "'one' is God." Ralph Martin explains this expression, "It is the expression of a creed. In this instance the confession is that 'God is one.' The origin of this monotheistic belief is the Jewish *Shema*, a confession used by Jews and Christians alike."²⁹⁵ The entire Bible, both Old and New Testament, speaks with one voice concerning the oneness of God; there is one God, one divine essence. The New Testament (based on the principle of progressive revelation) further explains the nature of God's oneness. The Lord's oneness is in plurality; God is a tri-unity.*

²⁹³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 590.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 613.

²⁹⁵ Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 89.

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The Oneness of God- the Unity of God

Deuteronomy 6:4	<i>YHWH ehad</i>	“Yahweh is one”
Isaiah 45:5	<i>eynod elohim</i>	“no other God”
Mark 12:29	<i>kyrios eis estin</i>	“The Lord, one is ”
Romans 3:30	<i>eis o theos</i>	“one is thee God”
1 Corinthians 8:4	<i>oudeis theos ei mē eis</i>	“no God except one”
1 Timothy 2:5	<i>eis gar theos</i>	“for one is God”
James 2:19	<i>eis estin o theos</i>	“one is thee God”

(Table 5)²⁹⁶

Three Subsistences (subsistantia)

Charles Ryrie comments on the significance of monotheism as it is presented in both the Old and New Testaments, he writes, “One insists that there is only one true God, and the other presents a man Jesus and the Holy Spirit who both claim to be God. . . . To accept both leads to the doctrine of the triunity of God.”²⁹⁷ The New Testament speaks of the Father, Son, and Spirit as the one God. It does not speak of three separate gods but presents all three— Father, Son, and Spirit as the one God. The Scriptural baptismal formula is in the Triune format, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). It should be noted that the baptismal formula is in the singular “name” of “the Father, Son, and Spirit,” and not the plural, “names (as noted earlier). This triune formula is scattered throughout the New Testament text. Paul writes, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Corinthians 13:13). At the baptism of Jesus, all three persons of the Godhead were evident. “Now after he was baptized, Jesus immediately went up from the water, and behold, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove coming upon him. And behold, there was a voice from heaven saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:16–17). The Trinitarian formula is most significant in relation to the salvation of God’s people. Salvation is the work of the Triune God who loves His creation. Believers are saved

²⁹⁶ This list is only representative and not exhaustive.

²⁹⁷ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 60.

“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and for sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2).

GOD THE FATHER

The Father is the most evident and agreed upon referent to the designation, “God.” The phrase “God the Father” is repeated sixteen times in the New Testament (John 6:27; 1 Cor. 8:6, 15:24 Gal. 1:1,3; Eph. 5:20, 6:23; Phil. 2:11; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:17; 2 John 3; Jude 1). The Father is God, but He is not alone the one God. Lewis Sperry Chafer explains, “The Father is not the one God of the Bible any more than is the Son or the Spirit. The Three are *one God*.”²⁹⁸ The Son and Spirit, along with the Father are the one God.

GOD THE SON

The most profound aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity is the fact that the Son, who being in very nature God, became man (Phil. 2:5-11). It is the man, Jesus Christ the Son of God, whom the Bible calls “God.” As demonstrated earlier, it was the deity of Christ that acted as a catalyst for the Church to seek the proper understanding of the nature of God, as revealed in Scripture. Beginning with the inception of the Church on the Day of Pentecost (and in the Gospels), Christ was worshipped as God. Pliny the younger (62–113AD) writing to Trajan (emperor 98–117AD) concerning the Christians said, “They were wont to meet together, on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as God.”²⁹⁹ Clement of Alexandria (153-217 AD) records this “hymn” to

²⁹⁸ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 311.

²⁹⁹ Charles Lee Feinberg, vol. 95, *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 95, 378 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1938), 192.

Christ, which says, “We praise the Father and the Sons, And the Holy Spirit of God.”³⁰⁰ Clement also wrote, “Taste and see that Christ is God.”³⁰¹

There is no doubt that historic Christianity has always believed that “Christ is God.” Tertullian (145-220AD) writes concerning Christ, “Now although Christ is God, yet, being also man, ‘He died according to the Scriptures,’ and ‘according to the same Scriptures was buried.’”³⁰² These very early witnesses record for us the essential and evident teaching of the New Testament— Jesus Christ is truly God. Historically, there was not enough time for any kind of “myth” to develop concerning the person and work of Christ. It is the hope of the skeptic to explain away this phenomena by inciting “embellishment” or “hero making” by the Church. From the statements of Jesus Himself, to the apostles and their disciples, the historical record bears out the absolute deity of Christ.

Jesus Concerning His Deity

One of the most egregious theological errors of our day is the assertion that Jesus Christ never claimed to be God. The standing charge against Jesus by the religious leaders of His day was that of blasphemy because “you, being a man, **make yourself out to be God**” (John 10:33). The declaration by Christ that “God was his father” entailed unequivocal claims to deity. “So on account of this the Jews were seeking even more to kill him, because he not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God his own Father, thus **making himself equal with God**” (John 5:18). In a blatant expression of deity, Christ attributed the Old Testament name of God, Yahweh, to Himself. “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I say to

³⁰⁰ Clement of Alexandria, “*The Instructor*” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire), ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 298.

³⁰¹ Clement of Alexandria, “*Exhortation to the Heathen*” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire), ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 196.

³⁰² Tertullian, “*A Treatise on the Soul*”, trans. Peter Holmes in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 231.

you, before Abraham was, **I am**” (John 8:58). To most English readers, this truth goes unnoticed due to the language gap between the first century and the twenty-first century. What was an evident truth to all of Christ’s contemporaries is now the privilege of scholarship. The Greek phrase εγω εμι (ego eimi) is a direct quote from the Scriptures of Jesus’ day called the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the LXX, Exodus 3:14, God revealed Himself to Moses as the “*ehyeh,*” the “I am,” the “*ego eimi.*” Robert Reymond explains that God “gave his people a name by which they might know him, he named himself ‘he is’ or ‘he exists,’ alluding to his self-existence and ‘faithful presence.’”³⁰³

The Hebrew verb *hāyah*, “to be,” forms the basis of the Old Testament name for God, YHWH, and in the Psalms, the shortened form, Yah. With the addition of the vowel points from Adonai, the tetragram, YHWH became Yahweh. Hence, the name Yahweh has its basis in the verbal phrase “I am.” In John 8:58, Jesus’ audience would have definitely made this connection. Authorial meaning, and a contextual understanding of the contemporary audience, is key to proper interpretation. There is no way of getting around the clear implications of the claims of Jesus concerning His deity. Moreover, the title “Son of God” and “Son of Man” are also clear claims of deity. The title “Son of Man” is clearly intended to bring to mind in Christ’s audience the divine figure of Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7:13-14). Additionally, Jesus is presented as God on virtually every page of the New Testament. Every time Jesus is called “the Lord” (Kyrios, κυριος) in the New Testament, He is being equated with Yahweh and Adonai, the LORD of the Old Testament. Gerald O’Collins explains,

In the Septuagint, the ... divine name YHWH [not pronounced out of reverence but replaced by Adonai, “Lord”] was rendered Kyrios or “Lord,” and, especially in the prophetic books, God could be called the Lord.... In applying Lord, the NT at times applies to Jesus this central name for the one true God.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 157.

³⁰⁴ Gerald O’Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 57.

John Concerning Christ's Deity

In the Prologue to the Gospel of John, the Apostle sets forth a clear presentation of Christ as God. John writes, “In the beginning was the Word [logos, λογος], and the Word [logos, λογος] was with God, and the Word [logos, λογος] was God” (John 1:1). The Greek reads, “εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος” (en archē ēn o logos kai o logos ēn pros ton theon kai theos ēn o logos).³⁰⁵ This passage not only teaches the deity of Christ but also reveals His relationship to the Father. John 1:1 explicitly teaches that at least two persons, “the Word (ο λογος, ο logos)” and “the Father (τον θεον, ton theon),” share one Divine nature—God-ness (θεος, theos). The second clause of this passage states, “ο λογος ην προς τον θεον” (o logos ēn pros ton theon), “the Word was with God.” The preposition προς (pros) is very important; it speaks of a certain kind of “with-ness” or relationship. It is not the συν (syn) kind of with-ness, which is being together in a group or room, as in “synagogue” or “syndicate.” It is not the μετα (meta) kind of with-ness, which is being along side, or beyond someone or something, as in “metaphysics” or “metadata.” The word is προς (pros) and it represents an intimate kind of with-ness, a face-to-face with-ness.³⁰⁶ “Pros” is the root of the Greek word “face,” προσωπον (*prosōpon*) and is commonly translated as “toward.” The Word and the Father are “with/toward/face-to-face” with each other in an intimate relationship. The Word here is set forth as being in relationship with the Father but also as “God the Word.”³⁰⁷

The last clause in John 1:1 is “θεος ην ο λογος” (thoes ēn o logos), “the Word was God.” This clause is intentionally mistranslated by the Jehovah’s Witnesses (JW’s) in order to teach that Christ is just “a god,” a secondary deity (JW’s are modern day Arians). The reasoning for such a translation is couched in pseudo-scholarship, or even the attempt to display “scholarship” when none is present. It is a well-sounding argument to the uninitiated. The argument is that θεος (theos) “God” should actually be translated as

³⁰⁵ Constantin von Tischendorf, Vol. 3, *Tischendorf’s Greek New Testament*. electronic ed. of the 8th ed., Jn 1:1. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

³⁰⁶ A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St John, With Maps, Notes and Introduction, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 62.

³⁰⁷ ο θεος, (o theos) with the definite article (o, the) for the most part refers to the Father, although ο θεος *o theos* is used of Christ as well.

“a god” because it does not have a “definite article” (i.e., the) in front of it in the Greek text. These kinds of nouns are called *anarthrous* because they do not have a definite article. There is actually no indefinite article, “a” or “an,” in Greek. Sometimes these anarthrous nouns can be translated with the addition of the English indefinite article, and sometimes no article is needed at all in translation. It is English language style and clearness of meaning that are key, along with the original meaning of the text. The presence of an anarthrous noun in Greek does not automatically necessitate the English translator to supply an English indefinite article. An anarthrous noun in Greek can be definite, indefinite, or qualitative.³⁰⁸ The simple explanation here (in John 1:1) is that θεός (theos) does not need the English indefinite article, and cannot have the indefinite article, theologically. The noun does not have the article because it is a predicate nominative, which means it is “qualitative.” It describes the nature or quality of the substantive noun, the subject— “the Word.” It could be translated as “the Word was God” or “the Word was Divine” or “the Word was fully God” or “the Word was Divine in nature.” The meaning of the text is that the Word is God, and within God there exists a relationship between the Father and the Word, and both are identified as the only true God. Alfred Plummer agrees,

The absence of the article with θεός shews that θεός is the predicate.... And the meaning is that the Logos partook of the Divine Nature, not that the Logos was identical with the Divine Person [of the Father]. In the latter case θεός would have had the article. The verse may be thus paraphrased; the Logos existed from all eternity, distinct from the Father, and equal to the Father. “Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.”³⁰⁹

The Apostle John, in his first epistle, made the most profound and powerful of pronouncements when he called Christ “the true God and eternal life.” John wrote, “*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, in order that we may know the one who is true, and we are in the one who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This*

³⁰⁸ See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999), 243-254.

³⁰⁹ A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 64.

one is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). The text in the Greek reads, “εν τω υιω αυτου ιησου χριστω ουτος εστιν ο αληθινος θεος και ζωη αιωνιος” (en tō uiō autou iēsou christō outos estin o alēthinos theos kai zōē aiōnios).³¹⁰ The most literal rendering of the text is, “...in the Son of Him, Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and life eternal.” One of the most important issues in this text is the determination of the referent of the demonstrative pronoun ουτος (outos). The question is, is the Father “the One who is true” or the Son, Jesus Christ? The exegesis of this text played an important role in the Arian controversy already mentioned. Those of the Arian and anti-Trinitarian persuasion insisted that the referent of this pronoun was God the Father. If the antecedent of “this one” is the Father, then we have John formulating a tautology; the true one (God) is the true one (God). It seems quite unlikely that John would engage in such tautologies. Not only this, but the Father is never referred to as “eternal life.” It is fair to say that this text is clear; Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life. As the great Lutheran commentator Lenski writes, “As the Father is the real (genuine) God, so his Son is the real (genuine) God, and this Son places us in fellowship with the Father.”³¹¹

Paul Concerning Christ’s Deity

In the epistles of Paul and the book of Hebrews, there are a number of very clear statements regarding the deity of Christ. The Apostle, in recounting the privileges of the Jews in his epistle to the Romans, breaks into a doxological discourse and declares that the Messiah/Christ is God in the flesh and blessed over all. “*To whom belong the patriarchs, and from whom is the Christ according to human descent, who is God over all, blessed forever! Amen*” (Romans 9:5). The Apostle Paul lucidly declares that in Christ all the divine attributes, the divine essence, and the divine prerogatives exist corporeally, “*Because in him [Christ] all the fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (Colossians 2:8c-9). The text reads in the original “το πληρωμα της θεοτητος σωματικως” (to plērōma tēs theotētos sōmatikōs), “the fullness of Divinity bodily.” This divinity is the nature or essence

³¹⁰ Tischendorf, Constantin von. Vol. 3 vol., *Tischendorf’s Greek New Testament*. electronic ed. of the 8th ed., 1 Jn 5:20. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

³¹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 545. (Cf., John 10:30; 12:45; 14:9).

of God, “Not merely the Divine perfections and attributes of Deity, but (*theotes*) the very essence and nature of the Godhead. Christ is not merely Godlike— He is God.”³¹² Christ is God incarnate; “the fullness of Divinity” embodied in human form. The word *σωματικῶς* (*sōmatikōs*) is an *adverb of manner* and describes “how” the fullness of Divinity resides i.e., bodily. The adverb, *sōmatikōs*, modifies the main clausal verb “dwells.” All that is God— God-ness— dwells in a body because Jesus Christ is truly God.

This statement is actually very shocking to the gnostic mind, and the specific group to which Paul was dealing. The idea that the Divine essence could be united with flesh was scandalous to the gnostic philosophy that was troubling the new church in the city of Colossae (Colossians 2:8).³¹³ This Gnosticism³¹⁴ taught an “adoptionism” that was very similar to that of dynamic monarchianism. Cerenthus, a gnostic (ca. AD100), taught that the incarnation really did not occur. The divine Christ or Logos came upon the human Jesus at His baptism and empowered Him during His earthly ministry. The Logos then departed from the man Jesus just before His death on the cross. In one joust of the sword of the Spirit, Paul severed the jugular of Gnosticism. “*Because in him [Christ] all the fullness of deity [indeed] dwells bodily*” (Colossians 2:9). God became incarnate in Jesus Christ and His glory was seen... the “glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14, ESV). This is the foundation and Good News of the Christian faith. Christ, who is God (Colossians 1:15; 2:9), created all things (Colossians 1:16-17), became flesh (Colossians 2:9; Romans 9:5), and died on the cross, was buried, and in three days was resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Romans 1:4; Colossians 1:21-22), and

³¹² William Evans and S. Maxwell Coder, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Enl. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 62.

³¹³ The word “philosophy” in Colossians 2:8 has the definite article (*tēs philosophias*), which indicates that the Apostle Paul had a particular philosophy in mind and therefore it is not an indictment against all philosophy. In the truest sense, Christianity is a philosophy.

³¹⁴ “Cerentian Gnosticism ... adhered to what is now referred to as a Docetic Christology. Adherents separate the two natures of Christ and regard the human aspects of his life as imaginary instead of being a necessary part of the incarnation. The Spirit of Christ empowered the human Jesus at his baptism but left him prior to the crucifixion. The principle behind these assertions was that if Christ suffered, he could not be divine.” Daniel L. Akin, vol. 38, 1, 2, 3 *John*, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001).

now salvation through faith is available to all who believe (Colossian 1:23; Romans 3:21-26; 4:3-8; 5:1-2).

In Paul's letter to Titus, he instructs his most trusted friend and fellow minister to appoint elders in the church at Crete. After his instructions concerning an elder's qualifications, he turns to proper Christian conduct. In the midst of his exhortation, he grounds Christian ethics in grace and the hope of Christ's return. He writes to Titus and says, "*Looking forward to the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*" (Titus 2:13). This "blessed hope" is the rapture of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The "blessed hope" is the coming of our God and Savior Jesus Christ to receive his Church unto Himself. The deity of Christ is most evident in the phrase, "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The Greek reads, "του μεγαλου θεου και σωτηρος ημων χριστου ιησου" (tou megalou theou kai sōtēros ēmōn christou iēsou), literally, "the great God and Savior of us, Christ Jesus." An important biblical observation, is the fact that the word, "appearing," επιφανειαν (epiphaneian), always refers to Christ and never to God the Father. It is also an "appearing of glory" επιφανειαν της δοξης (epiphaneian tēs doxēs), which is further a description of Christ's coming (Matthew 24:30). God the Father is not coming back "for" or "with" His Church, it is Christ who will come again. Also, the words "God" and "Savior" are governed by the same definite article in the text, which indicates that there is a unity of reference for both words (Granville Sharp rule).³¹⁵ Whoever is God is also Savior in this passage. Now, the words "Christ Jesus" are in apposition to the phrase "the great God and Savior." This means that the words "Christ Jesus" further identify "the great God and Savior." The great God and Savior is Christ Jesus. The identification of Christ as God could not be clearer from the grammar of this text.

Hebrews

In the epistle to the Hebrews, the writer explicitly calls the Son, Jesus Christ, "God." The writer takes an Old Testament reference to Yahweh

³¹⁵ Granville Sharp's rule states simply that if a single article links two or more singular substantives (excluding personal names), the second and subsequent substantives are related to or further describe the first. Cited in Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999), 110.

and applies it to Christ. The Psalmist writes, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom” (Psalm 45:6). The writer of Hebrews applied this passage to Christ. The writer remarks, “But concerning the Son, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of righteous is the scepter of your kingdom’” (Hebrews 1:8). In the LXX and the New Testament, the phrase is “ο θρονος σου ο θεος εις τον αιωνα του αιωνος”^{316, 317} (ο thronos sou ο theos eis ton aiōna tou aiōnos), literally, “the throne of you, O God, [is] into/to the age of the age [forever and ever].” There is no doubt that the writer to the Hebrews considered Jesus Christ truly God. There are numerous other passages in the New Testament that explicitly and implicitly teach that Jesus Christ is very God of very God. Not only is the Father called God, but the Son is also called God, and the Holy Spirit is identified as God in Scripture too. Scripture declares that there is one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

The deity and person of the Holy Spirit is not so much confirmed by direct statements in Scripture like those concerning Christ, but He is most evidently identified as God by His activities and attributes. The Holy Spirit is explicitly called God in one passage of the New Testament. “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, for what reason has Satan filled your heart, that you lied to the Holy Spirit and kept back for yourself some of the proceeds of the piece of land? When it remained to you, did it not remain yours? And when it was sold, was it at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to people, but to God’” (Acts 5:3–4). The Holy Spirit is God by virtue of His equal association with the Father and the Son (Romans 8:9-10; Titus 3:5–7; John 14:26). He also has all the attributes of God accredited to Him, and He performs actions that only God can accomplish.

- (1) He Creates (Genesis 1:1-2)
- (2) He Judges (John 16:8–11)

³¹⁶ Randall Tan, David A. deSilva and Logos Bible Software, *The Lexham Greek-English Interlinear Septuagint*, (Logos Bible Software, 2009), Psalms 44:7

³¹⁷ Harris, W. Hall, III. *The Lexham Greek-English Interlinear New Testament: SBL Edition*, (Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2010), Hebrews 1:8

- (3) He Pours out the Love of God (Romans 5:5)
- (4) He gives Joy (Romans 14: 17)
- (5) He gives Hope (Romans 8:17–25)
- (6) He gives Peace (Romans 8:6)
- (7) He causes Regeneration (John 3:5)
- (8) He can be Blasphemed (Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10)
- (9) He is Omnipresent (Psalm 139:7–12)
- (10) He is Omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10–11)
- (11) He is Truth (John 14:17)

Prepositions of the Economic Trinity

Three Persons	1 Cor. 8:6 Eph. 2:18	Eph. 4:4-6 Heb. 2:10	Col. 1:16- 17	Elohim Tri-unity
<i>The Father</i>	"one God"		"one God"	"from" (ek) Him and "through" (dia) Him and "for" (eis) Him are all things." (Rom. 11:36)
	(ek) "from" (eis) "for" (pros) "to"	–{Origin –{Purpose "	(epi) "over" all (dia) "thru" all (en) "in" all	
	"one Lord"		"one Lord"	
<i>The Son</i>	(dia) "thru" (dia) "thru" (dia) "thru"	–{Means " "	"one faith" (dia) "thru" whom	"from" (ek) Him and "through" (dia) Him and "for" (eis) Him are all things." (Rom. 11:36)
<i>The Logos</i> (John 1:1)			He [Christ] is the (eikōn tou theou) "image of God," (en) "by means of" or "in" Him all things were created, (dia) "thru" Him and (eis) "for" Him, all things have been created. He is (pro) "before" all things and (en) "in" Him all things hold together.	
"one Spirit"		"one Spirit"		
<i>The Holy Spirit</i>	(en) "by"	–{Agent	"one hope"	
"All things" are...				
(ek) "from" the Father –{Origin (dia) "thru" the Son –{Means (en) "in" or "by" the Spirit –{Agent (eis) "for" the Godhead –{Goal				
"...that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28)				

(Table 6)

THE DOCTRINE OF PERICHŌRĒSIS/CIRCUMINCESSION AND MUTUAL INDWELLING

The unity of the Trinity is to be found in the perichoresis, the mutual indwelling of the members of the Trinity.

—Donald G. Bloesch, *God, the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love*

They [the three Persons] reciprocally contain one another, so that one should permanently envelope, and also be permanently enveloped by the Other, whom yet he envelopes.

—Hilary, *De Trinitate*

The essential perichoresis of the divine persons produces a perichoresis of their glory: in every glorious act of one person the other persons are equally glorified.

—R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*

The doctrine of **Perichōrēsis** is a description of the “opera ad intra” (internal works) of the Trinity, what is called the *Immanent Trinity*. It is the concept pertaining to the interrelationship of the three persons of the Godhead in reciprocal existence. It is the mutual indwelling of each person in the other. This ancient and biblical doctrine teaches that the members of the Trinity are so closely bound together that the subsistence (hypostasis) of each person flows through the others. It is in perichoresis that the unity of the Godhead is found— perichoresis is the unity of the “Tri-unity.” The doctrine of Perichōrēsis asserts that each member of the Godhead is fully and completely present in the person and works of the others.³¹⁸ *The Dictionary of Greek and Latin Theological Terms* define it as “the coinherence of the persons of the Trinity in the divine essence and in each other.”³¹⁹ The Eastern Church Father, John of Damascus (675-749AD), was the first theologian to use the term περιχώρησις (perichōrēsis) to explain the indwelling of the Spirit in the Son in the Father. The word means, “a

³¹⁸ See Bloesch, *God, the Almighty*, 193.

³¹⁹ Muller, *Dictionary of Greek and Latin Theological Terms*, 67.

circulating” or “going about” in reference to the relation of the Divine Persons. In Latin the concept of Perichōrēsis is called circumincession, the “circular walking around” of the persons in the others. Carl F. H. Henry explains the terminology, “The purpose of these terms was simply to express that the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, that where the Father is, there the Son and Spirit are, and that what one person of the Trinity is doing, all are doing.”³²⁰ The Cappadocian Fathers (fourth-century) championed the doctrine of the Perichōrēsis and were primary in the articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. They were Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea. Millard Erickson writes, “[The] Cappadocians continued to emphasize that, while the three members of the Trinity can be distinguished numerically as persons, they are indistinguishable and inseparable in their essence or substance or being.”³²¹ Basil of Caesarea explains the dogma,

For all things that are the Father’s are beheld in the Son, and all things that are the Son’s are the Father’s; because the whole Son is in the Father and has all the Father in himself. Thus the hypostasis of the Son becomes as it were form and face of the knowledge of the Father, and the hypostasis of the Father is known in the form of the Son, while the proper quality which is contemplated therein remains for the plain distinction of the hypostases.³²²

Hilary of Poitiers (fourth-century), a western priest who was influenced and absorbed his theology from the Cappadocian Fathers, writes concerning perichōrēsis,

They do not dwell apart, retain their separate existence and condition, these Beings can reciprocally contain One Another, so that One should permanently envelope, and also be permanently enveloped by, the Other, whom yet He envelopes ... [Christ] Being God from God, Spirit from Spirit, Light from Light, says boldly, *The Father in Me*,

³²⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, vol. 5, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 206.

³²¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 362.

³²² Basil, *Letters* 38.8.

and I in the Father. For as the Father is Spirit, so is the Son Spirit; as the Father is God, so is the Son God; as the Father is Light, so is the Son Light.³²³

The nature of light may serve as a divine analogy with its activity of reflection, diffusion, and refraction. It can symbolize the Divine reciprocal existence “by” and “in” the other— the Divine dance of celestial light. As three surpassingly bright and transparent suns that are reciprocally “comprised in” and “appear in” the other as a single and infinitely brilliant light.³²⁴

The perichoresis of the three Persons is not a mere linking, but a complete mutual and reciprocal indwelling. Each person of the Godhead, while maintaining His distinction, is wholly in the others and the others are wholly in Him. The whole undivided essence of God is taken up and possessed equally by each of the three Persons.^(see Table 7) Thomas Aquinas taught that the one essence of God is the relationship of the three Persons. He writes,

Thence it follows that in God essence is not really distinct from person; and yet that the persons are really distinguished from each other. For person signifies relation as subsisting in the divine nature. But relation as referred to the essence does not differ therefrom really, but only in our way of thinking; while as referred to an opposite relation; it has a real distinction by virtue of that opposition. Thus there are one essence and three persons.³²⁵

³²³ Hilary of Poitiers, “*On the Trinity*”, trans. E. W. Watson, E. N. Bennett, S. C. Gayford and William Sanday, in, vol. 9a, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, Volume IX: St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), 62.

³²⁴ The idea of three transparent suns and one infinite light came from Dumitru Stăniloae, which is referenced in Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 492-93.

³²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.39 a.1 resp.

There is no God without the three persons of the Godhead. The essence is not distinct from the persons, but the essence is the three persons and each person possesses the essence equally, fully, and eternally. The essence of God is the sum total of the relationship of the three persons. Douglas Kelly writes,

God's substance inherently involves personal relationship with co-equals in that same substance. The three divine Persons are not superficially linked like three separate persons on earth in a sort of chain. Rather, perichoresis affirms, "a completely mutual indwelling in which each Person, while remaining what he is by himself as Father, Son or Holy Spirit, is wholly in the others as the others are wholly in him."³²⁶

Modern evangelical Christianity comes very close to affirming a kind of tri-theism. This is because there is a lack of emphasis and teaching on the unity of the Godhead. Donald Bloesch agrees that the doctrine of Perichōrēsis is key to understanding the unity of the Godhead. Bloesch writes, "The unity of the Trinity is to be found in the perichoresis, the mutual indwelling of the members of the Trinity."³²⁷ With the erroneous bent toward tri-theism, many today think that there is within the Godhead three personalities, with three wills, and three minds in some loose affiliation. In light of the biblical affirmation of perichoresis it is acceptable to consider the Godhead as one person, with one divine will and one divine mind. Cornelius Van Til agrees, "We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person. . . . We must hold that God's being holds an absolute numerical identity. And even within the ontological Trinity we must maintain that God is one. He is one person."³²⁸ Van Til also rightly affirms the historic language of Trinitarianism, he writes, "We speak of God as a person; yet we speak also of three persons in the Godhead. . . ." This means that "...unity and plurality are equally ultimate in the Godhead..."

³²⁶ Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 492.

³²⁷ Bloesch, *God, the Almighty*, 188.

³²⁸ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1979), 229.

so that "...God is a one-conscious being, and yet he is also a tri-conscious being."³²⁹

The biblical ground of Perichōrēsis is found primarily in the Gospel of John. John's gospel is the most theological of the biographies of Jesus. Within this gospel, one would expect to find this profound theological insight. In this gospel, we are told that the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. Elsewhere, Scripture teaches that the Spirit is said to be the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. With perichoresis, the presence of the one naturally involves the presence of the other.³³⁰ This interchange only makes sense by the mutual indwelling of each person in the other. This is why Jesus could rebuke Phillip for not discerning the presence of the Father in the Son. "*Jesus said to him, 'Am I with you so long a time and you have not known me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father! How can you say, "Show us the Father?"'"*" (John 14:9).

Biblically, Perichōrēsis is evidenced through...

- (1) The Work of God: "*But he answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.... For whatever that one does, these things also the Son does likewise'"* (John 5:17, 19). "*But if I am doing them, even if you do not believe me, believe the deeds, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father'"* (John 10:38). "*The Father and I are one"* (John 10:30).
- (2) The Will of God: "*That they all may be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, that they also may be in us, in order that the world may believe that you sent me"* (John 17:21).

³²⁹ Ibid., 220.

³³⁰ The doctrine of Perichōrēsis has many practical implications for Church life, as does all doctrine. There is a real disconnect today in the Church between doctrine and practice. The practical implications of a rich theology are unknown by many. The Church has almost zero theology expounded in today's pulpit, and so, a deep spiritual life is lacking. No matter how deep or lofty, theology is always practical for the Christian's faith and walk. Perichōrēsis, I believe for example, has a rich and sublime practicality for the Lord's Supper. Today, this ordinance (sacrament) has become so "common" that it borders on the sacrilegious by the lack of holy reverence for the Lord's Table. I encourage all to seek after Christ's doctrine and the implications of rich theology for their walk with Christ.

- (3) The Life of God (God is life and can give life, even to the dead): *“For just as the Father has life in himself, thus also he has granted to the Son to have life in himself”* (John 5:26). *“For just as the Father raises the dead and makes them alive, thus also the Son makes alive whomever he wishes”* (John 5:21). *“The Father and I are one”*” (John 10:30).
- (4) The Ontological Oneness of the Three Persons. *“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me”* (John 14:10–11). *“On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you”* (John 14:20). The “that day” is the descent of the Spirit (the Day of Pentecost, the beginning of the Church, cf. Acts 2) and the subsequent presence of God (baptism, infilling) in the believer’s life. *“Jesus said to him, ‘Am I with you so long a time and you have not known me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father! How can you say, “Show us the Father?”’”* (John 14:9). *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, in order that he may be with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it does not see him or know him. You know him, because he resides with you and will be in you.”* (John 14:16–17) *“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him”* (Romans 8:9).

These texts reveal that Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Christ. The Father, on behalf of Christ, sends the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. This is ontological unity.

HISTORIC WITNESSES TO THE DOCTRINE OF PERICHORESIS

Athanasius

“For like as the well is not a river, nor the river a well, but both are one and the same water which is conveyed in a channel from the well to the river, so the Father’s deity passes into the Son without flow and without division. For the Lord says, ‘I came out from the Father and am come’ (John 16:28). But He is ever with the Father, for He is in the bosom of the Father, nor was ever the bosom of the Father void of the deity of the Son. For He says, ‘I was by Him as one setting in order’ (Prov. 8:30). But we do not regard God the Creator of all, the Son of God, as a creature, or thing made, or as made out of nothing, for He is truly existent from Him who exists, alone existing from Him who alone exists, in as much as the like glory and power was eternally and conjointly begotten of the Father. For ‘He that hath seen’ the Son ‘hath seen the Father (John 14:9). All things to wit were made through the Son; but He Himself is not a creature, as Paul says of the Lord: ‘In Him were all things created, and He is before all’ (Col. 1:16). Now He says not, ‘was created’ before all things, but ‘is’ before all things. To be created, namely, is applicable to all things, but ‘is before all’ applies to the Son only.”³³¹

“For we see that reason is ever, and is from him and proper to his essence, whose reason it is, and does not admit a before and an after. So again we see that the radiance from the sun is proper to it, and the sun’s essence is not divided or impaired; but its essence is whole and its radiance perfect and whole, yet without impairing the essence of light, but as a true offspring from it. We understand in like manner that the Son is begotten not from without but from the Father, and while the Father remains whole, the Expression of His Subsistence is ever, and preserves the Father’s likeness and unvarying Image, so that he who sees Him, sees in Him the Subsistence too, of which He is the Expression. And from the operation of the Expression we understand the true Godhead of the Subsistence, as the Saviour Himself teaches when He says, ‘The Father who dwelleth in Me,

³³¹ St. Athanasius: *Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 84–85.

He doeth the works (John 14:10).’ which I do; and ‘I and the Father are one,’ and ‘I in the Father and the Father in Me (John 10:30).’”³³²

Basil of Caesarea

“For ‘I,’ God, ‘am the first, and I am the last’ (Is. 44:6). And hitherto we have never, even at the present time, heard of a second God. Worshipping as we do God of God, we both confess the distinction of the Persons, and at the same time abide by the Monarchy. We do not fritter away the theology in a divided plurality, because one Form, so to say, united in the invariableness of the Godhead, is beheld in God the Father, and in God the Only begotten. For the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son; since such as is the latter, such is the former, and such as is the former, such is the latter; and herein is the Unity. So that according to the distinction of Persons, both are one and one, and according to the community of Nature, one.”³³³

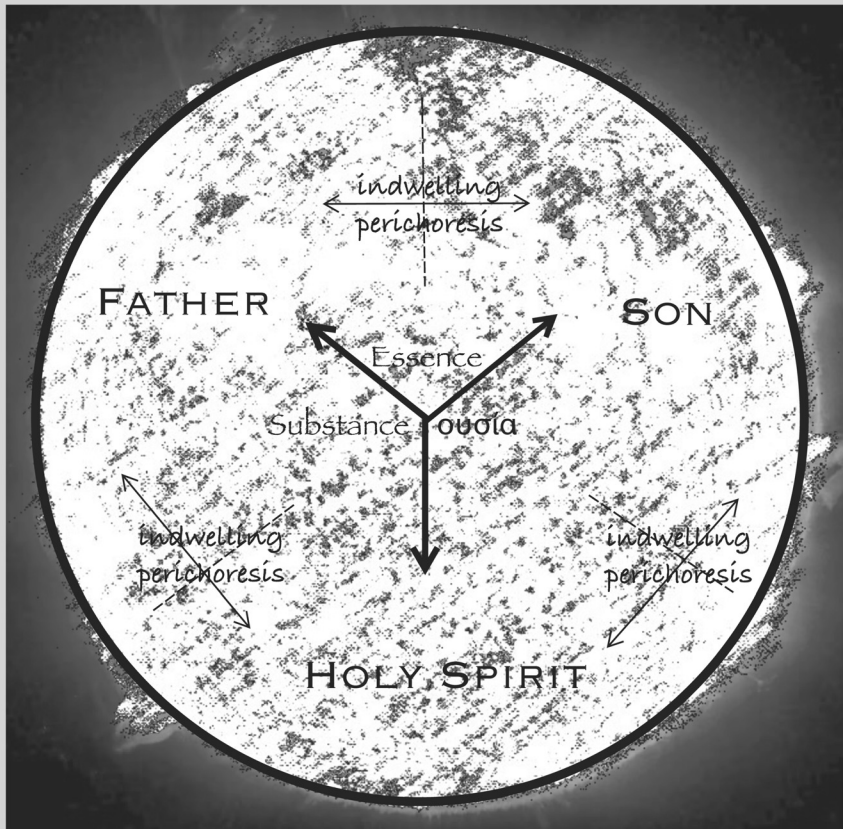
“He who receives the Father virtually receives at the same time both the Son and the Spirit; for it is in no wise possible to entertain the idea of severance or division, in such a way as that the Son should be thought of apart from the Father, or the Spirit be disjoined from the Son. But the communion and the distinction apprehended in Them are, in a certain sense, ineffable and inconceivable, the continuity of nature being never rent asunder by the distinction of the hypostases (*personas*), nor the notes of proper distinction confounded in the community (*unity*) of essence.”³³⁴

³³² St. Athanasius: *Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 366.

³³³ St. Basil: *Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Blomfield Jackson, vol. 8 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), 28.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

The Godhead in Relationship / Perichōrēsis



Explanation

ONE BEING (one substance): The essence of God is taken up and equally participated in by each Person of the Godhead. They are co-equal and co-eternal: one being, essence, or substance. The one Divine essence is the three Persons. The unity of the Trinity is in the mutual indwelling of the One in the Others.

THREE RELATING (three subsistences): The three Persons of the Godhead mutually indwell the other—Perichōrēsis. There is a circulation and reflection of the one in the other, as in light. The Persons are “three surpassingly bright and transparent suns which are reciprocally comprised in and appear in one another, bearing undividedly the whole of a single and infinite light.” Each reflects the other and each one communicates the other. The Father in the Son and the Son in the Father and the Spirit in both the Father and the Son. Seeing the one is seeing the other. The glory of the one is the glory of the other.

(Table 7)

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Attributes of God: Essential and Missional

*The perfections of God are those of our own souls, but He possesses them without limit. He is an ocean of which we have only received a few drops. There is in us something of power, something of knowledge, something of goodness; but these **attributes** are in entirety in Him.*

— Leibnitz, *Théodicée*

*The supreme, unutterable, impenetrable Being is alone in knowing Itself. True, it is manifest to all creatures **that God exists**; but they are utterly ignorant of what He is according to His substance and nature.*

— John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*

God's epithets are based upon the things He works in us.... But His essence is anterior to its operations, and we derive our knowledge of these operations from the things we perceive by our senses.

— Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*

*For from the creation of the world, his invisible **attributes**, both his eternal power and deity, are discerned clearly, being understood in the things created, so that they are without excuse.*

— Apostle Paul, *The Letter to the Romans*

DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

The Divine attributes are those **essential properties** by which God is God. The attributes of God are essential expressions of His essence. They are not “things” or “parts” by which the Divine essence is composed. For God is not a compound (made of parts) being, He is a simple being, His essence is His existence. God is fundamentally without parts or divisions—God is One. He is not constituted of knowledge and righteousness and holiness, as if, the essence was comprised of these properties, but God **is** righteous, God **is** Holy, God **is** knowledge. The Divine attributes are rational distinctions made by theologians in an attempt to answer the proposition, “what is God like.” Francis Hall explains,

The Divine Attributes express distinct perfections in the Divine essence. They do not indeed differ **in re** [in *reality*] as if the essence of God could be divided, but **in ratione** [in *reason*], which means that the Divine attributes are logical distinctions rather than ontological, although necessary and grounded in the eternal and immutable essence of God.³³⁵

The attributes of God are true and distinct (logical) predicates that enable us to speak of God. They are certain and actual predicates and are not mankind’s inventions. They are objective revelatory determinations rooted in the essence of God, by which He is described and known. The attributes are real, eternal, and immutable perfections grounded in the essence of God. Although the attributes are couched and confined by human language, they are, nevertheless, true and sufficient for our guidance in the knowledge of God. Ultimately, they are analogical in their descriptions of the Divine essence.³³⁶

The attributes of God have been typically organized into the “*incommunicable* attributes” and the “*communicable* attributes.”³³⁷

³³⁵ Francis J. Hall, *Theological Outlines, Vol. 1: The Doctrine of God*, 96.

³³⁶ See chapter 3, *Language About God*.

³³⁷ “The incommunicable attributes are those related to God as the Absolute Being, the Self-sufficient One. These belong to God exclusively, admit of no degrees, and have nothing resembling them in creation. They also deal with God’s transcendent greatness. On the other hand, the communicable attributes are those related to God’s

Alva J. McClain designated them as “God’s *greatness*” and “God’s *goodness*.”³³⁸ The attributes can also be organized, as to how God is in Himself (transcendent) and how He is toward creation (immanent). In our attempt to categorize the attributes of God, there is always the reality of abridgment. These classifications fall short of any comprehension of such a vast subject. Lewis Sperry Chafer cautions, “The attributes of God present a theme so vast and complex and so beyond the range of finite faculties that any attempt to classify them must be only approximate as to accuracy or completeness.”³³⁹ It is acknowledged that many of the classifications of God’s attributes are helpful and beneficial to the study of theology. It is hoped that our designations will add to the knowledge of theology and promote Gospel proclamation and evangelical commitments.

Our organization of the Divine attributes will be according to God’s **essential attributes** and His **missional attributes**. The essential attributes are found in God alone. They are His greatness and incomprehensible glory. The missional attributes are related to God’s dealings with creation, and therefore, are communicated in the Gospel. The *missional* attributes of love, goodness, grace, mercy, righteousness, holiness, and truth are in God and communicated in the Gospel. They are the results of the Gospel’s sanctifying work in believers. The missional attributes are communicated to mankind through special and common grace. People are called to display these characteristics in the Christian life and in missional/evangelical living. The *essential* attributes of aseity, simplicity, infinity, eternity, incomprehensibility, immutability, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, spirit, and perfection are in God alone, and they comprise His greatness and glory.

dealings with creation. These may be possessed in a finite way by both men and angels. They also relate to God’s immanence with reference to creatures.” Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 206.

³³⁸ Alva J. McClain, *God and Revelation* (Teachers Annotated Syllabus). Annotated and Revised by John C. Whitcomb, (Indianapolis: Christian Workman Schools of Theology, 1993).

³³⁹ Chafer, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 189.

The Divine Attributes

Essential Attributes (The Glory of God)	Missional Attributes (The Gospel of God)
Aseity/Simplicity (Ex 3:14; Jn 5:26; Acts 17:25,28)	Love (1Jn 4:8-9; Is 63:9)
Persona/Spirit (Jn 4:24; Ex 3:14; 1Tim 1:17, 6:15-16)	Goodness (Mk 10:18; Nah 1:7; Ex 33:19; Ps 34:8)
Infinity/Eternality (Ps 90:1-2; Job 11:7)	Grace (Ps 86:15; Ps 116:5; Eph 1:6-7; Eph 2:7; 1Pe 5:10)
Incomprehensibility (Ps 145:3; Is 40:28; Rom 11:33)	Mercy (2 Cor 1:3; Rom 12:1; Ps 52:8)
Immutability (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8)	Righteousness (Ps 11:7; Ps 89:14; Ps 45:6)
Omnipresence/Immense (Jer 23:23-24; Ps 139)	Holiness (Is 6:1-5; 1 Pe 1:15-16)
Omnipotence (Gen 17:1; Rev 19:6)	Truth (Ps 31:5; Is 65:16; Jn 17:3,17; 1Thess 1:9; Jn 14:6)
Omniscience (1Jn 3:20; Ps 139; Ps 147:4; Is 40:26-28)	
Perfection (Matt 5:48; Ps 18:30)	

(Table 8)

VIA TRIPLEX (THE TRIPLE WAY)

The acquisition of the knowledge of God's attributes through the *via triplex*, "the triple way," has effectively served the Church for centuries. The "via triplex" or three ways are three distinct methods of inquiry into the knowledge of God's essence. The way to the knowledge of God's attributes is through the *via negativa*,³⁴⁰ the *via eminentiae*,³⁴¹ and the *via causalitatis*.³⁴² These three ways are three deductive methods for deriving the content of the Divine attributes. They are the "way of negation"

³⁴⁰ The way of negation, a method of defining the divine attributes by negating the attributes of the finite order. Creatures are measurable, mutable, and finite; God is immeasurable, immutable, and infinite. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 326.

³⁴¹ The way of eminence, as opposed to *via negativa*, is the method for the positive derivation of divine attributes by raising attributes of things in the finite order, particularly spiritual attributes of human beings, to the order of the infinite (e.g., power becomes omnipotence; wisdom becomes omniscience). This method rests on the analogy of being. *Ibid.*, 326.

³⁴² The way of causality, a method of identifying the divine attributes by means of the relationship of effect to cause. *Ibid.*, 326.

(removing all limitations), “*the way of eminence*” (maximizing creaturely attributes to perfection) and the “*way of causality*” (deriving divine attributes through formal cause and effect relationships). Francis Hall explains the *via triplex* as the way,

- [1] of causation, inferring the nature of His attributes from the nature of His works
- [2] of negation, excluding the idea of external or finite limitation
- [3] of eminence, ascribing every perfection to God which is consistent with His infinity, to the exclusion of all quantitative and temporal measures and comparisons.³⁴³

Specifically, the way of negation has been historically used to define the divine mysteries and is called the *apophatic* method.³⁴⁴ The term “apophatic” comes from the Greek verb *αποφημι* (*apophēmi*) and means, “to say no to.”³⁴⁵ Due to the deficiency of language and human peccability this approach is necessary to define the essence of God. One of the clearest historic uses of this approach comes from the framers of the Creed of Chalcedon. The person of Christ is defined in an apophatic way in that His divine and human natures are “without confusion, without change, without division, [and] without separation.”^{346, 347} The *via negativa* is really

³⁴³ Francis J. Hall, *The Being and Attributes of God, Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 231.

³⁴⁴ Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite is credited for developing this “negative” approach to theology though he was not the first to speak of the things of God by negation. See Gregg Allison. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 190.

³⁴⁵ See “*Apophatic Theology*” in Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 1, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 105-107.

³⁴⁶ “One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one prosopon and one hypostasis— not parted or divided into two prosopa but one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets of old and Jesus Christ Himself have taught us about Him and the creed of our fathers has handed down.” Philip Schaff, vol. 2, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 62.

³⁴⁷ ασυγχυτως (unconfused) απρεπτως (unchanged) αδιαιρετως (undivided) αχωριστως (unseparated)

an attempt to make positive statements about the Infinite by removing (negating) all limitations. Norm Geisler writes, “We must remove all limitation (potency) from a term before its positive characteristic (its actuality) can be applied to an unlimited Being...” and so “...all negations imply an affirmation.”³⁴⁸ The way of negation is used in reference to the essential attributes of God. Human beings do not, and cannot know the essence of God in any positive sense, therefore, the *via negativa* must be used. All we know of God’s essence is limited and finite in mode, and even the language, which is employed, is imperfect. The word *infinite* itself is a negation, it means, “not finite.” The word *eternal* means, “not terminal,” *immutable* means “not changeable,” *necessary* means “not contingent,” *aseity* means “not caused,” and *spirit* means “non corporeal.” These attributes are all negations, and this is what is meant by the *via negativa*. It is defining God by what He is not; nevertheless, it is still an attempt to make positive affirmations about Him. Thomas Aquinas writes,

We must use the method of negative differentiation, particularly in the consideration of the divine substance. For the divine substance, by its immensity, transcends every form that our intellect can realize; and thus we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is, but we have some sort of knowledge of it by knowing what it is not.³⁴⁹

And additionally,

Now, the mode of supereminence in which the above-mentioned perfections are found in God can be signified by names [attributes] used by us only through negation, as when we say that God is eternal or infinite, or also through a relation of God to other things, as when He is called the first cause or the highest good. For we cannot grasp what God is, but only what He is not and how other things are related to Him.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two: God, Creation*, 26.

³⁴⁹ Aquinas, vol. 1, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 33.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

The positive method or the *kataphatic* aspect of the *via triplex* is evident in the way of causation³⁵¹ and the way of eminence. These kataphatic “ways” still produce affirmations that are in need of being qualified by negative adjectives. To speak of God’s goodness, it still needs to be qualified by the negative adjective “infinite,” as in “infinite goodness”— God is unending or non-terminal goodness. In speaking of the attributes of God, we will employ the *via triplex* in order to express the glory, greatness, and goodness of ‘*the One who is*’. We do this understanding that no human expression can comprehend the One who fills heaven and earth. The heart is full of inexpressible wonder and awe, and the mind is overcome with the profundity and sublimity of it all. It is hoped that ultimately our attempt does not end in linguistic idolatry. May the LORD be merciful to us! “*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for eternity! Amen.*”³⁵²

DEFINING ESSENCE

*Can you find out the **essence** of God, or can you find out the ultimate limits of Shaddai?*

– Zophar the Naamathite, *The Book of Job*

*It is written, “We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face.” Now that which is seen face to face is seen in its essence. Therefore God will be seen in His **essence** by the saints in heaven. Further, It is written, “When He shall appear we shall be like to Him,*

³⁵¹ John Calvin emphasized the need to focus, not on vain speculations into God’s essence, but on His relation to us through cause and effect. He said, “Hence it is obvious, that in seeking God, the most direct path and the fittest method is, not to attempt with presumptuous curiosity to pry into his essence, which is rather to be adored than minutely discussed, but to contemplate him in his works, by which he draws near, becomes familiar, and in a manner communicates himself to us.” And, “Here let us observe that his eternity and his self-existence are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated. Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us; so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), I, v, 9; I, x, 2

³⁵² Romans 11:36

because we shall see Him as He is.” Therefore we shall see Him in His essence.

– St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*

It is the hope of the believer that one day God will be seen in His essence (i.e., face-to-face). This hope will be realized on the Day of the Lord’s coming or the day of one’s death. “Today,” though, we can only perceive God’s essence dimly as looking through a dark glass. What follows is only an attempt to clear the ambiguity of this dark glass. It is for man’s eternal beatitude that the Infinite God has willingly condescended to let Himself be known. It is through His attributes that God’s essence is discerned, but His essence can never be comprehended or seen “*per se*,” i.e., in itself. We can only see God through His effects, and we cannot see Him in Himself until glorification. Aquinas writes, “We are unable to see His essence, we come to know His existence not in Himself but in His effects.”³⁵³ It is also through God’s effects that His attributes are discerned. Before we go on to examine the attributes of God, we will examine briefly what it means to predicate and speak of something’s “essence.”

Primary Substance – Individual

There are ten categories upon which we predicate things about individuals or substances. These ten categories were discerned and explained by Aristotle. The tenth category (technically, the first) is the substance itself, and the nine categories are the things that can be further said about the substance. An Individual or primary substance is called *ousia*. (The word *hypostasis* also means essence or substance. In regard to the Trinity, *hypostasis*, $\nu\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ is used in reference to the “individual substances” [persons] of the Godhead and *ousia* [technically, *deutra-ousia*, secondary substance] is used in reference to the substance/essence of *God-ness*).

A person or a dog or a plant is called an individual or substance. An individual is also referred to as a “primary substance.” This is to distinguish individuals from “secondary substances” (the *deutra-ousia* of humanness), nature or universals, which can be predicated of individuals as well. An individual can have things predicated of it called qualities, accidents, or

³⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.11

attributes. Qualities are said to be “present in” primary substances or individuals. Qualities cannot exist independently or apart from primary substances. For example, white cannot exist without an individual substance having whiteness “in it,” as in a white table or white dog. Qualities or accidents are things like color, shape, size, et cetera. In other words, these are things that can be predicated of primary substances. A proper noun is an individual or primary substance and cannot be a predicate. Only common nouns can be used to predicate things of individuals. Consider the statement “Bill is tall.” Now tallness is “present in” Bill; therefore, it is an attribute or quality of Bill. It can also be said of Bill that he is “tall” and “handsome.” This is the distinction of subject and predicate.

Secondary Substance – *deutra ousia* (species/kinds)

Primary substances or individuals can also be grouped together into “kinds of substances” or species like “man.” Kinds or species can be spoken of together because they are alike. Species are called secondary substances, i.e., a *deutra ousia* (δευτρα ουσια). Secondary substances can be predicated of primary substances or individuals, for example, “Bill is a man.” This tells us the “kind of substance” (*deutra ousia*) that is Bill. An individual is **identified** (who) and a species is **defined** (*whatness, quiddity, essence, “what it is”*). Bill could be a man, or Bill could be a dog, or Bill could be a pig. The species will tell us the “kind of substance” (*essence*) that the “particular substance” (*instantiated essence*— an individual) is.

The Way Species Are Alike – Genus

The way that a species is alike is called its *genus*. A genus can also be predicated of an individual substance. We can say that “Bill is an animal” or “Jasper is an animal.”

What an Individual Is – Genus + Difference = Species

The species and genus can be predicated together as in “Bill is a man and a man is an animal.” The species and genus of an individual tells us the “what-ness” of the individual. The most important thing predicated of

an individual substance is its genus and species. The predication of genus and species gives us the individual's "essence" by telling us what kind of being it is. Species and genera tell us what the individual substance is "*essentially*," and the other predicates tell us what it is "*accidentally*." For example, Bill is a man essentially, but he is a "tall" man accidentally. "Tallness" is not essential to Bill. Further, a species is defined by giving its genus and difference. Bill is a man (species) and his species is that of a *rational animal*. A **definition then signifies a thing's essence** and consists of the genus and difference. The essence of Bill is a rational animal, which is a man.

PREDICATION

The nine categories that a primary substance (an individual – "Bill") and a secondary substance (species – "man") can have predicated of them are *quantity, quality, relation, place, time, posture, having, action* and *being acted on*. None of these **accidents** are essential to being a man (species) or an animal (genus). These categories are "senses" in which a thing may be said, "to be." *Ousia* or *essence* means the "nature" (e.g., *humanness*) of an individual or primary substance. *Ousia* means "*what a thing is*;" it also means that a thing has such and such a quality, quantity, relation, et cetera.

As demonstrated earlier, **essence** and **existence** are distinct in contingent being. Things can be predicated of essences without reference to whether or not they actually exist. As in, "the Sith lord, Darth Vader, is six foot five inches tall." Being is not a genus that can be predicated of an essence. Essence and existence are distinct and can only be joined by God, being cannot be formally predicated, although it can be a second level predicate of existential affirmation.^(See Table 9) Composition is the act of creation that gives existence to an essence, which is called having "being." Aquinas explains, "Wherefore only substances are properly and truly called beings; whereas an accident has not existence, but something is by it, and so far is it called a being; for instance, whiteness is called a being,

because by it something is white.”³⁵⁴ In a secondary way being may be predicated analogically.³⁵⁵

God is a **simple** Being and has **no accidental** qualities or attributes. The things that are predicated of God are predicated of Him **essentially**. This is why it is said that God *does not have* righteousness, as if it was “in” Him accidentally, but God **is** righteousness. Whatever may be predicated of God must be predicated of Him essentially. This is the **identity** of God’s *essence* and *existence* (His simplicity), existence and everything that is said of God is His essence; nothing is accidental in God. All attributes as well as existence are God’s essentially and not accidentally. Hilary of Poitiers confesses, “In God existence is not an accidental quality, but subsisting truth.”³⁵⁶ This truth is where the nature of language and our inability to truly know the essence of God breaks down. The finite collapses when the Infinite God is being spoken of and explained. Stephen R. Holmes explains,

The divine essence is fundamentally beyond our conceptions; all our language and thought, limited as it is by created categories, is inadequate to speak of what God is. Through God’s gracious revelation of himself, we have been given names to name God, and actions by which we might perceive God at work. However, our names suffer from the same limitations as our language and thought: they point towards the ineffable; they do not define or grasp it. The core illustration of this is their multiplicity: we know that the simple essence of God cannot be subject to composition, because composition is one of those created realities we can grasp.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. q90. a2

³⁵⁵ See the chart, “*Predication of Being: the analogical use of being.*” This is a complex philosophical matter and the resource cited in the chart is highly recommended.

³⁵⁶ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, VII

³⁵⁷ Stephen R. Holmes. *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity.* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2012, Kindle Edition), Loc. 1299-1303

THE PREDICATION OF BEING: *the analogical use of "being"*

<p>FIRST LEVEL (MODE) "BEING"</p>	<p>"Accidents are called beings in a manner analogically related to the way substances are called beings, insofar as accidents are also items in the world, albeit they depend on substances in which the accidents inhere."*</p> <p>SECOND LEVEL (MODE) "BEING"</p>
<p>Substantial Being (substance)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'quid est'- what is it? ▪ a thing ▪ divided by the nine categories (the tenth category being substance itself). ▪ 'real being' ▪ 1st level (mode) includes the 2nd level ▪ ens (an entity)- includes its essence (form), accidents, esse (act of existence/ actus essendi) and matter. ▪ 'id quod est' ▪ "is" - a copula ▪ a person (individual) <p>➤ <i>essence and existence</i></p>	<p>Accidental "analogical" Being (accident)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'an est'- is it? (Does it exist?) ▪ a proposition ▪ the truth of a proposition, one of the nine categories ▪ 'being of reason' (judgment) ▪ 2nd level (mode) alone, does not include the 1st level ▪ esse- act of existence (<i>esse</i> is not a formal accident but it is the very actuality of <i>essentia</i>).** ▪ 'actus essendi' (a metaphysical predicate "is") ▪ "is" - existential affirmation or judgment. [As a metaphysical predicate "is" (<i>esse</i>) signifies the "act-of-existence" of the subject. It affirms that in reality "existence" inheres in the subject, as in "Socrates is (exists)." That is, such a one called Socrates has been actualized and given being.] ▪ blindness (privations and negations, [evil is real, like tallness, but it does not have substance]) <p>➤ <i>existence</i></p>

(Table 9)

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³⁵⁸ Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity: an investigation into the foundations of his philosophical theology*. (Switzerland: Peter Lang Ltd., 2008), 69. Aquinas writes, "'Being' is predicated in many senses.... Some things are called a being or said 'to be' because they have existence of themselves, as substances do, which are beings in the primary and first sense (first level). Others are called beings because they are affections or properties of substances, such as the accidents of any substance (second level)." *Metaphysicorum* IV 1.1 n.539

³⁵⁹ "Thomas recognizes that Ibn-Sina (Avicenna) has made a crucial distinction between a thing's essence and the fact of its existence: like an accidental

In creatures “existence” is accidental, a second level predicate; but in God “existence” is a first level predicate, it is substantial/essential to God. Essence and existence are identical in God—His essence is existence.

It is in the second sense that we can know that God exists, and this, through his effects.

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE (RECAP)

The third *Thomistic Thesis* states, “Wherefore, in, the exclusive domain of existence itself God alone subsists, He alone is the most simple. Everything else, which participates in existence, has a nature whereby existence is restricted, and is composed of essence and existence as of two really distinct principles.” All individual substances are composed of essence and existence. “**What they are**” (*essence*) and “**that they are**” (*existence*) are really distinct. It is in virtue of a things existence that we say, “*that it is*” and in virtue of its essence that we say, “*what it is.*” This is also the answer to metaphysical monism— beings differ in the kind of being they are.³⁶⁰ They are composed of potency and act. “Where” a substance is in its “motion” of potency and act is what causes the individual substance to differ from other beings.³⁶¹ Norm Geisler explains,

This is possible because beings have within them a real distinction in their being between their existence and their essence. That is to say, being is not a homogenous, undifferentiated whole. Rather, created being is a dynamic,

property, existence is not contained within something’s essence. Therefore we speak of esse in created beings as if it were an accident, even though it is in fact the very “actuality” of created beings. Even things that are unchanging (Angels) have their existence “accidentally,” in the sense that their unchanging existence is not given with their essence but depends on something else.” Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt. *Holy Teaching: Introducing the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition), Loc. 4558-4563

³⁶⁰ Monism sees all reality as “one.” God and the universe are one thing, one Being.

³⁶¹ Motion is the “change” in the world (and) of being and becoming, potency, and act. It is in this context that Aristotle spoke of the unmoved mover. Also, motion was the very thing for which the ancients sought for an answer. It was the existential change of Heraclitus that caused him to speak of the “flux” in and of the world and to postulate the Logos as the “pou stō,” the grounding of this change. Ultimately, it is in Christ (the true Logos) that “we live, and move, and have our being.” Amen.

complex composition of essence and existence. It has the correlative principles of potency and act.³⁶²

In all created beings, essence (*what-ness*, quiddity) is really distinct from existence (*is-ness*, existence). Geisler continues, “Since finite beings have different potentialities (essences), these finite beings can be differentiated in reality when these potentialities are actualized (or brought into existence) in different kinds of beings.”³⁶³ If an essence is to exist, there must be conjoined with that essence an “act of being” (existence). Being is “what is” and there are many kinds of being. Infinite Being is the only being that is Pure Being, and there can only be one such Being— God. Finite being is complex because it is composed of essence and existence. Finite being is an admixture of act and potency but Infinite Being is pure actuality. There can only be one Pure Being that is also necessary Being; it is being “in and of” itself. The ground of being cannot be composed of essence and existence. Pure Being is *ipsum esse subsistens* (being itself subsisting). All other being (finite) is complex and only “has” being. From angels, to man, to animals, to plants, to rocks... all things just “have” being. God “is” Pure Being, He is not composed of act and potency, or matter and form, and “His essence is His existence.” Therefore, He is of Himself, *a se*, and exists essentially, “*per se*.”

ASEITY/SIMPLICITY (Exodus 3:14; John 5:26, 14:6; Acts 17:25, 28) God is *ens a se*, “being of itself” and *ens non ab alio*, “being not from another.”

And God said to Moses, saying, “I am the existing one” and he said, “this you will say to the sons of Israel, ‘the Existing one’ has sent me to you (Exodus 3:14 LXX).³⁶⁴

Aseity, (*aseitas*) is derived from the Latin phrase “*ens a se*” which means “being of itself.” It is the divine attribute by which God exists by

³⁶² Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, 25.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁶⁴ My translation of: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν λέγων Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἔρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς. Swete, Henry Barclay. *The Old Testament in Greek: According to the Septuagint* (Text), Ex 3:14. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009).

Himself, in Himself, and through Himself. It is not the notion of self-causation but means that the sufficient reason for God's existence is found "of Himself." In English, aseity carries the general notion of self-existence. "The self-existence of God," William G.T. Shedd writes, "denotes that the ground of his being is in himself."³⁶⁵ The principle of aseity (being of itself) communicates the fact that God's essence or nature is "to be" or "to exist," the reason for His existence is entirely of Himself. God looks to no other (*ab alio*) for His existence. The English word *aseity* is comprised of three parts: "a" of, "se" itself, and "ity" the state of, which means "the state of being of oneself." God as "a se" is of Himself while all other things are "ab alio," through or from another (John 1:3). Aseity denotes the fact that *God exists necessarily*, while all other things are only contingently existent, dependent on God for their very being.

God is also said to be *αυτοθεος* (autotheos), "of Himself God." God is Pure Being Himself: alone, unaccompanied, underived, absolute, complete, all-embracing, all-encompassing, incorruptible, indestructible, comprehensive, unlimited, eternal, and everlasting. He is God of very God. His essence is life, *zoē* life. He is the "I Am," the Existing One. The divine name "I am" is the simplest yet most profound way of expressing the self-existent nature of God. The idea of self-existence comes out of both the divine name and our reflection upon the nature of being itself. Something is; therefore, something has always been, and if something has always been, then something must have been self-existent, *ipsum esse subsistens* (subsistent Being), and necessary Being. God is necessary being (*ens necessarium*); He is immune to generation and corruption. He is factually and logically necessary; it is impossible that He could have ever come into existence and impossible that He should ever go out of existence. God's non-existence is logically impossible. He is a most necessary being. He is '**the One who is**'. John of Damascus wrote, "It appears then that the most proper of all the names given to God is 'the One who is', as He Himself said in answer to Moses on the mountain, 'Say to the sons of Israel, the One who is hath sent Me.'"³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 2003), 276.

³⁶⁶ Or "He who is." John Damascene, "*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*," trans. S. D. F. Salmond in, vol. 9b, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume IX: St. Hilary of Poitiers*,

God is also a simple being; His essence is His existence and His existence is His essence. He is not composed nor is He defined by genus and difference. Stephen Charnock wrote of the simplicity of God, saying, “God is the most simple being ... he being his own essence and existence.”³⁶⁷ “*What God is*” and “*that God is*” are answered in the same manner because His essence is His existence. God is pure actuality, and there is no potentiality in Him. His essence is to exist, and it is impossible that He not exist. He gives existence, and therefore, does not share in existence. Aquinas explains,

Nothing can be the sufficient cause of its own existence, if its existence is caused. Therefore that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore, it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence.³⁶⁸

God is life and the fountain of life (Psalm 36:9). In Him was (already existing) life and light (John 1:3-4). God is pure being and pure existence (Exodus 3:14). He is truth and life (cf. 1 John 5:20; John 17:3). He is the ἀρχηγός (archēgos)³⁶⁹ of life (Acts 3:15).

Divine Simplicity also necessitates that we do not speak of God as having distinct qualities or accidents but that He is His own attributes. He is life, He is love, He is knowledge, and He is goodness. God does not have being, but He is Being. God does not have knowledge, but He is knowledge. Joseph Pohle writes, “He is actus purus; and therefore each separate divine perfection logically postulates every other divine perfection, because all His perfections are identical among themselves and with His essence and existence.”³⁷⁰ Even though we speak of God as “His essence being His

John of Damascus, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), 12.

³⁶⁷ Stephen Charnock, vol. 1, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2002), 333.

³⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.3 a.4 resp.

³⁶⁹ Prince, Ruler, Founder, Originator, Author, Initiator, Beginner

³⁷⁰ Joseph Pohle and Arthur Preuss, *God: His Knowability, Essence, and Attributes, A Dogmatic Treatise, Dogmatic Theology* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1911), 211.

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existence,” and as having distinct attributes or qualities, He still remains fundamentally indescribable. We cannot know Him in Himself, and so God remains ultimately undefinable. Joseph Pohle continues, “The undefinable Divine Being has its place above and beyond all genera and categories, because it cannot be univocally subsumed under any common genus with created beings.”³⁷¹ John of Damascus (675-749 AD) also confirms Divine Simplicity and writes,

The Deity is simple and uncompound. But that which is composed of many and different elements is compound. If, then, we should speak of the qualities of being uncreated and without beginning and incorporeal and immortal and everlasting and good and creative and so forth as essential differences in the case of God, that which is composed of so many qualities will not be simple but must be compound. But this is impious in the extreme.³⁷²

God is “*a se*” and simple. He is beyond all human categories and definitions. Simplicity and aseity are also foundational to our understanding of God’s other attributes and activities.

SPIRIT/PERSONA (Acts 17:28-29; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:15-16)

Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, to the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Who lives in unapproachable light, whom no human being has seen nor is able to see. (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16)

God is personal spirit, “*God is Spirit*” πνευμα ο θεος (pneuma o theos, John 4:24). God is immaterial and incorporeal. In John 4:24, the word *spirit* πνευμα (pneuma) is in the emphatic position and is qualitative. It speaks of God’s nature and essence. God is neither a body nor is He embodied. He does not have matter or form. Because God is spirit, He cannot be represented by images and must be worshipped in spirit and

³⁷¹ Ibid., 211.

³⁷² John Damascene, “*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*,” 12.

truth (John 4:24). God is invisible, immaterial, and only “seen” by His effects. Scripture associates the working of the invisible God as wind and light in the world (John 1:4; 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:16). Light and wind are two analogous forces in the world that help our visualization of the God who is an active, living spirit. Spirit is real and eternal and is the ground of all mind and personality (2 Corinthians 4:18b). Personality covers several united attributes. Personality denies that the First Cause is merely an unconscious, blind force or principle or that God is the impersonal sum total of existence. Alva J. McClain defines personality as “a name given to the nucleus of a definite group of functions or characteristics.”³⁷³ These functions are...

- (1) Life (1 Timothy 4:10)
- (2) Intelligence (1 Samuel 2:3; Isaiah 29:16)
- (3) Purpose (Ephesians 1:11; 3:11)
- (4) Activity (Philippians 2:13; John 5:17)
- (5) Freedom (Psalm 135:5-6)
- (6) Self-consciousness (Exodus 3:14)
- (7) Emotion (Jeremiah 31:3)
- (8) Spirituality (John 4:24)

Spirit is the ground of personality. In the account of Lazarus and the Rich Man, we notice that even in death and disembodiment, Lazarus still had all of the faculties of personality (Luke 16:19ff). A material body is only the avenue of expression for personality in the world and is not the nucleus or ground of it.

The universe is full of the marks of personality. It displays the evidence of a great Mind. The fact that the universe is finite also expresses the plans and purposes of a persona. A Person brought the universe and all that is in it into existence with design and determination. The creation of people with personality necessitates the fact that the cause itself has personality. How can the originator of personality be anything less than personal? Can the originator of design, purpose, mind, and the like lack the sufficient qualities to produce such effects? Effects participate in their formal causes. This is the “way of causation.” God is spirit, and as spirit He is personal,

³⁷³ Alva J. McClain, *God and Revelation* (Teachers Annotated Syllabus). Annotated and Revised by John C. Whitcomb (Indianapolis: Christian Workman Schools of Theology, 1993), 21.

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active, invisible, immaterial, and incorporeal. Alva J. McClain concludes, "Spirit is not a synonym for personality (*It is the center of personality*). There could be no function without something to function. Spirit is the basis out of which the functions arise. Thus, God is the very essence of personality (John 4:24)."³⁷⁴

INFINITY/ETERNALITY (Psalm 90:1-2, 147:5; Job 11:7)

O Lord ... even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God (Psalm 90:1–2).

Can you find out the ultimate limits of Shaddai (Job 11:7).

To speak of God as infinite means that He is not finite. The word is Latin and means "without end," or "unlimited." God is not limited in His essence in any way except by what is internal to Himself. External relations do not limit God. The essence of God cannot be brought under any limitation of space or time. God's infinity is not extensive as if it were of size or quantity. The concept of infinity denies any imperfection of any kind or in any respect. It also denies that God can be measured in any way. Things can be measured as to extension (space), duration (time), and perfection (being). The fact that God cannot be measured or limited in any way means that He is infinite (unlimited in space), eternal (unlimited in time), and perfect (unlimited in being). God is also unique in His infinity; there is none like Him. Aquinas writes, "The fact that the being of God is self-subsisting, not received in any other, and is thus called infinite, shows Him to be distinguished from all other beings, and all others to be apart from Him."³⁷⁵ Infinity escapes any positive definition, but it can be related to the idea of being absolute in all respects. The quality of infinity can be attached to all of God's attributes. God is infinitely good, infinitely just, infinite in knowledge, and infinite in love, et cetera.

The eternity of God is related to the concept of time. God is eternal in the strict sense of the word. In the broad sense of the word, all men will be eternal after the general resurrection. Since time is a created property of this material universe (Titus 1:2; Genesis 1:1), it makes sense that the immaterial is not subject to the laws of physics. Spirit, then, is

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 31.

³⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.7 a.1 ad.3.

not subject to time.³⁷⁶ God is eternal in that He has no beginning and no end. All time is an ever-present “now” to Him. Boethius (500AD), in *De Consolatione Philosophic*, defined eternity as “a simultaneously full and perfect possession of endless life.”³⁷⁷ Boethius taught that the “passing now” makes time and the “standing now” makes eternity. From God’s point of view, in eternity all temporal events are real and available to Him at a single timeless moment (*tota simul*, “all at once”). For God, the eternal is conceived of as “one everlasting state,” and for a temporal being time is “a succession of states.” He can causally act in the past, present, and future from His ever-present now. God’s eternity flows from His necessity. God exists necessarily and it is impossible that He not exist; He can never go out of or come into existence. God’s eternity is one of necessary existence, without beginning and without end. God’s existence cannot be measured by time (Psalm 90:1-2). He transcends time as its creator (Genesis 1:1). God is beyond time and is said to dwell, or inhabit, eternity (Isaiah 57:15, NKJV). God also dispensationally ordered and arranged the ages as its King and Sovereign. “[His] Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He constituted the ages”³⁷⁸ (Hebrews 1:2, WUESTNT cf., 1 Timothy 1:17) and “That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Ephesians 1:10, NKJV, cf. Ephesians 3:2, NKJV).

We might also speak of an eternity past and an eternity future in regard to the fact that God has chosen to create a time bound reality in which we live. In the same sense that Christ became incarnate (related Himself without change in His essence), we may also speak of the fact

³⁷⁶ Created spirits exist in what is called an *æviteral* mode of being. It is the duration of finite spirits that are not subject to the space/time dimension of this universe. We might say that their essential being is above “time,” but they are liable to accidental modifications of temporal succession (succession of thoughts).

³⁷⁷ “eternitas est interminabilis vitae tola simul et perfects possession”

³⁷⁸ “Age (αἰών). This term, which is translated world thirty-one times in the Authorized Version (King James) of the New Testament, means a block or period of time. It hardly need be said that there is no observable relation between the English noun world and a period of time. By reason of this confusion in terms, the whole revelation respecting successive ages was soon lost to view because of the translation. A clear illustration of how the translators worked is set forth in Hebrews. 1:1–2. Here the translation worlds has come from αἰών and by this term it is here declared that Christ arranged or programmed the successive ages of time.” Chafer, vol. 7, *Systematic Theology*, 121.

that God, in relation to the time-bound universe, is now, *parachronos* (παραχρονος). God has in no way changed His essence by creating time, but He has decided to work alongside of time in relationship with His creatures. His infinity, aseity, simplicity, and eternity allow Him to come “alongside of” and work “in” time without being touched in His essence, and therefore, He remains timeless and immutable. It is indeed the fact the God transcends time that allows Him to work “in” and “through” time. Transcendence grounds imminence, infinity and eternity make space and time possible. God must necessarily be beyond time for He could not be its author nor could He know the future if He was subject to its parameters. Any account of foreknowledge in God demonstrates that He is timeless. For any objective knowledge must come from without, as a fish could never comprehend the ocean because it is a part of it.

The biblical fact that God works with His time-bound creatures and honors their contingency has been the occasion for heretical doctrines like Open Theism and process theology. Such unorthodox ideas speak of God’s so-called “contingent knowledge” (open theism) and “essential change” (process theology).³⁷⁹ These concepts must be rejected on the grounds of their irrationality and unbiblical nature. God is not a being like us, but He transcends all creaturely confinements and categories. Mankind must not make God in our image. We must not make material or conceptual idols (Exodus 20:4).

DYNAMIC IMMUTABILITY (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8)

For I, Yahweh, have not changed (Malachi 3:6). *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (Hebrews 13:8).

³⁷⁹ Due to space, we do not have time to discuss the deeper issues of God’s relation to time. See Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time*, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2001), Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 2002). Concerning Open Theism see, Bruce Ware, *God’s Greater Glory* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2004), Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2000), J. Piper, J. Taylor, P.K. Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2003), Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

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Mutability is the passing from one state to another. If a thing changes from one species to another, it is said to be substantially changed. For example, a hydrogen atom with the addition of a proton to its nucleus will become a helium atom. Also, hydrogen peroxide, if it loses one hydrogen atom, will become water. This is **substantial** change. Something can also change accidentally, as in mechanical motion in a body, growth in a body, or a set of thoughts or volitions in the mind. This is **accidental**, or non-essential, change. Immutability is the denial of any kind of change, either substantial or accidental, in God. God is immutable (unchanging) in His being, perfections, promises, and purposes.³⁸⁰ Immutability conveys the fact that God is unchanging in His character and essence. Aristotle expressed the concept of immutability in his reference to the Unmoved Mover who is the unchanging source of all change. To the Greeks, the phenomenon of motion and change needed an answer. Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, noted all the change or “flux” in the world. He spoke of all this motion and change as “becoming.” He said that the only thing that was unchanging in the world was change itself. He noted that all things move and change. For Heraclitus, “the Logos” brought *cosmos* to all the *chaos* of change. To the pre-Socratic philosophers God, or the Logos (though impersonal), was the one unaffected by all of the mutability they witnessed.³⁸¹ As with the philosophical notion of pure actuality, it is impossible that something that is pure act should have any motion or potency. This reflects on the idea of God’s simplicity as well. If any motion were possible, it would result in an addition or subtraction to the Divine simplicity. God cannot have any real or virtual composition to His essence. There can neither be substantial change nor accidental change in the Divine essence. John of Damascus emphatically asserted, “Change does not touch God’s nature.”³⁸² God is absolutely unchangeable in His essence.

Jesus Christ is the true Logos and the genuine Unmoved Mover of the world. He is unchangeable in His nature (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58),

³⁸⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 163.

³⁸¹ “There is, however, in Heraclitus’s system, an underlying order, generally unattainable, that made sense of the whole. This he called the Logos.... [F]or the Stoic tradition, the Logos was the immanent principle of order within the world (roughly as it had been for Heraclitus), which they identified with God.” Stephen R. Holmes. *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity*. Kindle Edition, Loc. 771-773.

³⁸² John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 7.

unchangeable in His promises (Romans 11:29; 2 Corinthians 1:20), immutable in His will and purposes (Psalm 110:4; 33:11; Hebrews 6:17-18), and immutable in His character (James 1:17). He also does not change His mind (1 Samuel 15:29; Numbers 23:19). God is in an absolute sense immutable, and this is the ground of hope for believers. If God could change, He could at any time revoke the promises, gifts, or covenants that He has made. He would also have good reason to change His mind because we have shown ourselves faithless. But in our faithlessness, He still remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). Scripture declares, "*He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind*" (1 Samuel 15:29, NIV84).

Immutability does not mean that God does not or cannot act in the world. God acts in the world without change in His essence, will, or [fore] knowledge. Immutability does not mean lifelessness or pure immobility.³⁸³ Robert Reymond writes,

The God of the Bible is portrayed as acting on every page of the Bible! He is not static in His immutability; He is dynamic in His immutability. But His dynamic immutability in no way affects His essential nature as God [that is, His "*God-ness*"]; to the contrary, He would cease to be the God of Scripture if He did not will and act in the ways the Bible ascribes to Him. But He always wills and acts, as Isaiah declared, in faithfulness to His decrees. "In perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago" (Isaiah 25:1).³⁸⁴

The doctrine of immutability, considered in light of God's actuality, infinity, and perfection should carry with it the idea of pure infinite liveliness, which truly relates, acts, and even condescends to the world of becomingness. The fact that God works in the world and ultimately became incarnate means that He is truly related to His creation. God's simplicity, infinity, and perfection do not confine Him in any way; God's nature is

³⁸³ Barth writes, if God "is the pure immobile, it is quite impossible that there should be any relationship between Himself and a reality distinct from Himself." Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II, 1:494

³⁸⁴ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 178-79.

such that it ensures that He is absolutely unhindered in His actuality. He is indeed “actus purus;” the great I am, who came into the world. Thomas Weinandy writes, “God is unchangeable not because he is inert or static.... He is so dynamic, so active that no change can make him more active. He is act pure and simple.”³⁸⁵

Dynamic immutability is simply the extrinsic change that accompanies relationships. Dynamic immutability is not *subject* change (as in God) but *object* change (as in the world). Intrinsic change is a non-relational change in the subject, as with fruit becoming ripe or as a child that grows in knowledge and stature. Intrinsic change can never happen in God. Extrinsic change is outside the subject; it is change in something to which the subject is related. My wife, Tami, has been five-foot-two inches tall for as long as we have been married. Her height has been and will be immutable for the rest of her life (under normal circumstances). My son, Kent, out-grew his mother this past year and is now six-foot tall. He will eventually grow to about six-foot-four inches in height. As he grows he will undergo change in height, but as his mother is related to him, she was once taller and will become shorter and shorter in relation to him over time. There is absolutely no intrinsic change in her—it is all extrinsic—but there is a dynamic in her immutable height. This is one way to envision dynamic immutability; of course all analogies break down when we discuss the infinite. God as infinite can be related to a changing world without it changing Him. God is truly related to the world, so the “dynamic” in His immutability is the real change happening in the world, whether substantial or accidental. Also, in all relationships there is motion, God dynamically relates to the world in a way that makes for a genuine relationship. This is done without any mutability in Him as He relates to us.

Even the incarnation was a change in the object (extrinsic change) and not change in the essence of God. Infinity can relate itself to the finite without change, either substantial or accidental. The dignity of the human nature could accommodate the incarnation. The human nature was created in the image of God and existed in a state that made it fit for the assumption of the Divine person. The incarnation was the ultimate expression of relationship, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). The incarnation was not Divinity moving toward humanity but humanity moving towards the Divinity.

Any apparent “change” in God’s will or actions in Scripture is just our perception of God’s real relatedness to changing creatures. Other instances

³⁸⁵ Thomas G. Weinandy. *Does God Change?* (Still River, MA: St. Bede’s, 1985), 79

of supposed “change” in God’s will are due to the fact that there are real, intermediate causes in the world that have power to produce certain effects. These effects may be the result of “chance” or “free will” and they are truly contingent. They may be spoken of as occurring under the permissive will of God. All secondary or intermediate causes are under the power and will of the First Efficient Cause— God. Hezekiah’s illness in Isaiah chapter thirty-eight is one example. According to the secondary cause (the illness), Hezekiah was going to die. God wills the actions of secondary causes and at times may intervene in their effects. So, God’s will never changed in relation to Hezekiah; He just intervened (interrupting the secondary cause and its effect) and ultimately, Hezekiah changed. Prayer does not change God, prayer changes His people. At times prayer is the intermediate or secondary cause for accomplishing God’s will. God honors His people with true partnership and true relationship.

INCOMPREHENSIBILITY (Psalm 145:3; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 11:33)

Great is Yahweh, and very worthy of praise, and his greatness is unsearchable (Psalm 145:3).

Have you not known, or have you not heard? Yahweh is the God of eternity, the creator of the ends of the earth! He is not faint, and he does not grow weary! There is no searching his understanding (Isaiah 40:28).

Something that is *incomprehensible* is something that cannot be contained, fathomed, or measured. It relates to God’s utter transcendence over creation. His nature is so great that mankind could never acquire exhaustive knowledge of Him, in this life or the next. Charles H. Spurgeon comments, “We cannot tell you what Godhead is. We do not know what substance that is which we call God. It is an existence, it is a being; but what that is we know not.”³⁸⁶ John of Damascus writes,

God then is infinite and incomprehensible: and all that is comprehensible about Him is His infinity and

³⁸⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Immutability of God*. No. 1. *Spurgeon’s Sermons*: Volume 1, electronic ed. (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).

incomprehensibility. But all that we can affirm concerning God does not show forth God's nature, but only the qualities of His nature. For when you speak of Him as good, and just, and wise, and so forth, you do not tell God's nature but only the qualities of His nature.³⁸⁷

It has already been admitted that we cannot know the essence of God but also that we can only know His effects and the qualities of His nature in part. This is because God is truly great and beyond finding out. There is no searching His greatness and knowledge.

God is incomprehensible in His...

- (1) Works (Job 9:10; Job 37:5; Ecclesiastes 11:5)
- (2) Essence (Job 11:7-9; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
- (3) Power (Job 26:14)
- (4) Eternality (Job 36:26)
- (5) Hiddenness (Job 33:13-14)
- (6) Thoughts (Ps. 92:5 Isaiah 55:8-9; Isaiah 40:28)
- (7) Omniscience (Psalm 139:1-6;)
- (8) Greatness (Ps. 145:3)
- (9) Spirit (Isaiah 40:13)
- (10) Judgments (Romans 11:33-34)

As stated previously, God is knowable but He can only be known in part and dimly. Our knowledge of Him is imperfect. There can never be a univocal statement made concerning Him since language itself is insufficient in describing the interminable and unfathomable. Therefore, the terms of revelation are expressed analogically. This analogical predication, though, is true and sufficient for soteric knowledge (John 17:3; 1 John 4:7).

OMNIPRESENCE/IMMENSITY (Jeremiah 23:23-24; Psalm 139)

Where I can go from your Spirit, or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, there you are, and if I make my bed in Sheol, look! There you are. If I lift up the wings of the dawn, and I alight

³⁸⁷ John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.

on the far side of the sea, even there your hand would lead me, and your right hand would hold me fast (Psalm 139:7–10).

“Do I not fill up the heaven and the earth?” declares Yahweh (Jeremiah 23:23–24).

“God is everywhere present,” Richard A. Muller writes, “in the sense of being unbounded by space or measure. God is everywhere present because he is an infinite spiritual, immaterial being who cannot be contained or restricted by physical dimensions.”³⁸⁸ God is not localized in space nor is He extended in space as a body. God does not have matter and form, for whatever has matter and form is a body. God is pure actuality and cannot have any capacity or potentiality. Bodies are in motion and are divisible; therefore, because of His aseity and simplicity, God cannot have a body or be contained in space.

Material things are extended in space by three dimensions. To measure space is to speak of the volume of a body. A thing can exist in space in two ways—circumscriptively and definitely. A thing is said to exist circumscriptively in space if it is divisible into parts corresponding to the parts of the surfaces surrounding it. This is formal extension in space. Only bodies are divisible and can be said to exist circumscriptively in space. A thing is said to exist definitely in space if its presence is limited to a certain part of space and its whole substance is everywhere within the bounds of that part of space. This is the way that a soul exists in the body—conterminously in the body. The whole of the soul’s essence exists in the whole of the body and the whole soul in every part of it. This is what is called “virtual extension.” The soul/spirit of a man is virtually extended in his body, and the soul/spirit is what animates his body.

When God is said to be omnipresent it means that He exists in everything, but neither circumscriptively nor definitely. God transcends all spatial boundaries and transcends all loci. He is wholly transcendent and immanent to His creation. God is wholly present to all points of space and is present to all things.³⁸⁹ God’s presence permeates all things. God is said to exist *infinitely virtual* everywhere. God is everywhere but not as a part of everything’s substance, as in pantheism, nor is the universe His body, as

³⁸⁸ Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 208–209

³⁸⁹ See Charles Hodge, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 383–385.

in pantheism. Pantheism says that God is present in the universe as a soul in a body. Neither of these views is acceptable for biblical theology.

The biblical witness to God's omnipresence postulates that God permeates heaven and earth. He exists *infinitely virtual* everywhere and in everything. He exists everywhere in everything and abides in eternity. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:24, NKJV). "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15, NKJV). His presence fills all dimensions and His essence fills all epochs. Sir Isaac Newton, in his third book of *Principia Scholion Generale*, said, "God is present everywhere, not only by his power, but also by His substance; for power cannot subsist without substance."³⁹⁰ Thomas Aquinas writes,

God is present everywhere in everything not indeed as part of their substance, but in the way agents are present to and in causal contact with what they act upon. Since existence itself is what God is by nature, he it must be who causes existence in creatures. During the whole period of the creature's existence, then, God must be present to it in a way its own existence is.³⁹¹

God is causally present to all things in that He causes and sustains their very being. When God conjoins an "act of being" (or existence) to an essence, He must also hold that essence and existence together through "per se" causal contact. This is confirmed in Scripture, "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Nothing is distant from God; He is in all things and acts upon them causally. This would be true for all that exists, even in an eleven-dimensional multiverse. Since God is by nature existence (pure actuality), He is the One who actively causes existence in everything. Not only does God cause existence in everything, but He also sustains everything as Scripture confirms: "*Sustaining all things by the word of His power*" (Hebrews 1:3).

"Now existence is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else..." Aquinas continues, "Everything else is potential

³⁹⁰ Cited by Michael Shallo, *Lessons in Scholastic Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Peter Reilly Publisher, 1916), 346.

³⁹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, 22; *Summa Theologica*, I q.8 a.1 resp.

compared to existence. So God must exist and exist intimately within everything.”³⁹² This is what Peter Kreeft calls the great syllogism, “God is existence itself, and existence itself is most intimately present at the heart of every being. Therefore, God is most intimately present at the heart of every being.”³⁹³ God is intimately in everything, causing its very being. This is because God is existence itself (*ipsum esse*). The most profound of statements is that “in Him” (God Himself) all things have their being, their motion, and their life. The presence of my body excludes everything else in the space that it occupies, but God is the very space that I exist in. My spatial presence does not exclude God, but my being is caused by, and is in, God. This is the most profoundly impactful truth for the believer. John of Damascus writes,

God permeates and fills the universe as the Scriptures say, *Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lords?* For it is an impossibility that one body should permeate other bodies without dividing and being divided, and without being enveloped and contrasted, in the same way as all fluids mix and commingle.³⁹⁴

God is truly the One in whom all things live and breathe and stand and move and exist. Oh, the depths of the riches of His grace and mercy to all that exists and especially to the believer.

God is in everything in two ways, (1) by **making** and (2) by **filling**. By *making* “a place” a place, God makes all places what they are. By *filling*, God fills every place not as a body, but by giving existence to whatever occupies the place. Wherever God exists, He exists wholly. God exists everywhere and in everything by nature. A thing’s nature is not measured by its locale or place, so something can exist wholly by nature in more than one place. The nature of “whiteness” or “redness” is wholly present in every point of a white or red surface, though its extent is not. Immaterial things only have wholeness of nature. The soul exists in the body by nature. At every point in the body the soul exists, and it exists wholly. A part of the soul is not in the arm and another part in the leg like a humanoid phantom.

³⁹² Ibid., 22.

³⁹³ Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, Modern Scholar Course Guide* (Recorded Books, LLC, 2009).

³⁹⁴ John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 3.

Just like the soul, God is wholly present everywhere within everything. He is omnipresent, or infinitely virtual, by nature everywhere and in everything. This is also His immensity.

Biblically, there are different “ways” in which God is said to be present. We may speak of His...

- (1) Personal Presence
- (2) Providential Presence
- (3) Particular Presence

These terms are distinctions in which it can be said “how” God is present. First, there is God’s *particular presence*. This is the specific presence of God **in** heaven as His place of dwelling. “*Yahweh looks down from heaven upon the children of humankind*” (Psalm 14:2). “*Yahweh has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all*” (Psalm 103:19). “*For God is in heaven, and you are on earth*” (Ecclesiastes 5:2). “*Our Father who is in heaven, may your name be treated as holy*” (Matthew 6:9). God’s *particular presence* will change from heaven above to the new Jerusalem on the new earth. “*Behold, the dwelling of God is with humanity, and he will take up residence with them, and they will be his people and God himself will be with them*” (Revelation 21:3–4). He will also sit on the throne in Jerusalem in the millennium. “*And Jesus said to them (his disciples), ‘Truly I say to you that in the renewal of the world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me—you also will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’*” (Matthew 19:27–28). “*Now when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from one another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*” (Matthew 25:31–32).

Second, there is God’s *providential presence*. This is the way He is present **in** and **to** everything in an active way. “*Behold, the heavens and the heaven of heavens could not contain you*” (1 Kings 8:27). “*And he himself is before all things, and in him all things are held together*” (Colossians 1:17). “*In whose hand is the life of all living things and the breath of every human being?*” (Job 12:10). “*For from him and through him and to him are all things*” (Romans 11:36). “*Because all things in the heavens and on the earth were created by him ... all things were created through him and for him*” (Colossians 1:16 cf. Acts 17:24–29).

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Third, there is God's *personal presence*. This is the way that God is present **in** and **with** believers. There is no doubt that God is present to the believer in a way that He is not present to unbelievers. God indwells the believer through His Spirit and has a special love and presence to the believer. "*To whom God wanted to make known what is the glorious wealth of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27 cf. Ephesians 1:10–14).

Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologiæ*, describes the way in which God may be present to everything as a king is to his kingdom. God is everywhere by substance, presence, and power. A king exists by **power** everywhere in his kingdom, by **presence** everywhere in his field of vision, and by **substance** wherever he is sitting. In like manner, God may be said to be by power everywhere; by presence everywhere, as seeing everything; and by substance everywhere, as causing everything's existence.³⁹⁵ This corresponds roughly to omnipotence (power), omniscience (seeing), and providence (causing/sustaining). Omnipresence presupposes omnipotence and omniscience.

OMNIPOTENCE (Genesis 17:1; Revelation 19:6)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1, ESV). *Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns* (Revelation 19:6, ESV).

The Divine name of El Shaddai (God Almighty) reveals the infinite power of God. Omnipotence is the attribute of Divine will to which no limits can be affirmed. Omnipotence is not "universal possibilism," in which God can make a square triangle. It is not illogical licentiousness. Omnipotence is the ability to actualize certain states of affairs that are in harmony with the Divine nature. It is God's ability to do as He wills and pleases; in this sense it is connected with His sovereignty and freedom.

³⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, 22.

OMNISCIENCE (1 John 3:20; Psalm 139; Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 40:26-28)

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it (Psalm 139:1-6, NKJV).

With him are wisdom and powerful deeds, and to him belong counsel and understanding (Job 12:13).

God is omniscient; He is all-knowing and His wisdom and understanding are without limit. God's knowledge is perfect. Job spoke of "*the marvelous works of the one with perfect knowledge*" (Job 37:16). Thomas Aquinas writes, "in God there exists the most perfect knowledge."³⁹⁶ The knowledge of God is all-inclusive. It involves all things in all times, past and future (1 John 3:20). God also knows the hidden thoughts and secret motives of all people. "*Yahweh knows the thoughts of humankind*" (Psalm 94:11). Omniscience is "having all knowledge and being all-knowing, it is the attribute of God by which God knows all things, all events, and all circumstances of things and events perfectly and immediately in his timeless eternity."³⁹⁷ Alva J. McClain writes, "God's knowledge is all-inclusive, eternal, perfect, complete, and is turned toward moral ends"³⁹⁸ (cf. Proverbs 15:3). God also has knowledge of all possible combinations of circumstances.³⁹⁹ This can be called "what if" knowledge (Matthew 11:21; 1 Samuel 23:1-13). God's omniscience includes all personal details and actions of all people. It includes,

³⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.14 a.1 resp.

³⁹⁷ Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 210.

³⁹⁸ Alva J. McClain, *God and Revelation* (Teachers Annotated Syllabus). Annotated and Revised by John C. Whitcomb. (Indianapolis: Christian Workman Schools of Theology, 1993), 42.

³⁹⁹ The idea of middle knowledge is not present here. Knowing possible outcomes to real persons in real situations is not the same as Molinistic counterfactuals. Counterfactuals cannot be ontologically grounded. Middle knowledge has to do with possible worlds with possible persons in possible circumstances. But possible outcomes for "real" people in "real" contingent circumstances can be and is ontologically grounded, this is because the people and situations have real existence.

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- (1) Our **cognition** (Psalm 139:1-4),
- (2) Our **composition** (Psalm 139:15)
- (3) Our **character** (Proverbs 5:21)
- (4) Our **core** (Jeremiah 1:5)
- (5) Our **contingencies** (Matthew 10:30)

Simplicity and Knowledge

God does not have knowledge He is knowledge. God is a most simple being. His existence is His essence; therefore, it is improper to speak of Him as having or gaining knowledge. His simplicity would be compromised if anything could be added to His essence, which includes knowledge. God does not learn; He is knowledge and He is perfect. There is no contingency to God's knowledge. God's knowledge is essential. God knows essentially and unchangeably. He cannot have dependent or conditional knowledge. In God, there is no notion of passive potentiality or any accidental knowledge.⁴⁰⁰ The knowledge of God is not capable of progressive improvement. It is infinitely perfect and it embraces every conceivable object of thought and is infinitely perfect from eternity. The infinite perfection of God's knowledge is not attained by any succession of ideas, compounding of predicates with subjects, or syllogistic conclusions. He is God and He is knowledge. Aquinas states, "It must be affirmed that God's knowledge is His substance."⁴⁰¹ God is Pure Actuality and Actual Thought. In God, "to be" is "to know." Augustine says, "It is the same thing with God to be as to be wise."⁴⁰² Aquinas also writes, "In God to be is the same thing as to understand."⁴⁰³ God knows by an all-embracing act of intuition. God knows whatever exists perfectly insofar as it all preexists in Him. Aquinas continues, "Whatever effects pre-exist in God, as in the first cause, must be in His act of understanding, and all things must be in Him according to an intelligible mode."⁴⁰⁴ This means that God knows all

⁴⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.175.

⁴⁰¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.14 a.4 resp.

⁴⁰² Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity", trans. Arthur West Haddan In, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume III: St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 111.

⁴⁰³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.14 a.4 s.c.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., I q.14 a.5 resp.

things because all things are “in Him,” for He is knowledge. “*For from him and through him and to him are all things*” (Romans 11:36).

Foreknowledge and Predestination

God is not in time, therefore, He does not foresee events before they happen; He sees them eternally, perfectly and all at once as they happen temporally. God is the cause of all things and events by His knowledge. So, whatever exists and whatever happens cannot exist or happen unless God has decreed it and knows it in Himself. All creatures, all actions, and all circumstances were present to the mind of God from eternity, even the “free acts” of rational creatures.⁴⁰⁵ God knows all things and ordains all things (Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1). He knows all things in Himself because He is the cause of all things. Aquinas writes,

The knowledge of God is the cause of things. For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer [Artist] is to things made by his art. Now the knowledge of the artificer [Artist] is the cause of the things made by his art from the fact that the artificer [Artist] works by his intellect.⁴⁰⁶

God necessarily knows from eternity what men will do in the course of time, but His knowledge does not *force* them to act. There is true contingency in their actions, and therefore, responsibility. God is not the author of evil nor is He the primary cause of human sin.

God’s Will and Man’s Will

God is the primary or first cause of man’s will. God’s causal relation to our acts of will is necessary for mankind to have the “act of will” in the first place. There is a dual agency in causation—God and man. God is the

⁴⁰⁵ Adam and Eve were the only truly free human beings. Since the fall, no human is truly free. Man is free to do according to his nature and desires, which is to sin. Scripture is clear concerning the bondage of man’s will after the Fall. See footnote 441 for a further explanation.

⁴⁰⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.14 a.8 resp.

primary efficient cause of man's action. Man is the secondary efficient cause of his actions. Dual agency is seen in the case of God's will and the will of Joseph's brothers. Dual agency permitted God to act sovereignly without causing Him to be the author of sin. Joseph's brothers sinned and were held responsible, but God also sovereignly decreed the action of Joseph's brothers. "As for you, you planned evil against me, but God planned it for good, in order to do this—to keep many people alive—as it is today" (Genesis 50:20). In this passage, the word "planned" is תָּשַׁבַּח *hāšab* and it means "to account, to plan, to consider, to reckon, to invent."⁴⁰⁷ "The basic idea of the word is the employment of the mind in thinking activity."⁴⁰⁸ God's knowledge was at the nucleus of what transpired. God caused the action and Joseph's brothers caused the action. Aquinas comments,

We receive not only the power of willing from God, but also the operation.... God not only gives powers to things but, beyond that, no thing can act by its own power unless it acts through His power.... Man cannot use the power of will that has been given him except in so far as he acts through the power of God. Now, the being through whose power the agent acts is the cause not only of the power, but also of the act.... Therefore, God is for us the cause not only of our will, but also of our act of willing.⁴⁰⁹

God's omniscience is related to His sovereignty— He knows and wills absolutely. In the case of Adam and Eve, Adam ate of the tree by his own free will and God willed (predestined) that Adam eat of the tree by his own free will. Aquinas further explains,

Now there is no distinction between what flows from free will, and what is of predestination; as there is no distinction between what flows from a secondary cause and from a first cause. For the providence of God produces effects

⁴⁰⁷ Warren Baker, *The Complete Word Study Concordance: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003), 1552.

⁴⁰⁸ Leon J. Wood, "767 תָּשַׁבַּח" in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 330.

⁴⁰⁹ Emphasis added. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.2.36.

through the operation of secondary causes.... Wherefore, that which flows from freewill is also of predestination.⁴¹⁰

In Adam's "act of will" there were two efficient agents with two different agendas. Adam's purpose was for his own will to be done, which ultimately brought evil into the physical universe. And God's purpose was to bring evil into the physical universe so as to overcome it completely and finally. God was the First Agent and Adam was a secondary agent, moved by the power of the First Agent. God intended to work out His plan for the cosmos by allowing evil to enter in through the first parents, and so, deal with evil permanently. This was for the purpose that sin would never again enter into the lives of angels or men for all eternity. God as the First Cause moves all secondary causes to accomplish His will, and He "*works all things*" in accordance with "*His will*" and "*purpose*" (Ephesian 1:11). This "working" would also include the salvation of the elect, known before time began (Titus 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 1:9; cf., Ephesians 1:3-14). Aquinas continues concerning predestination,

Thus, it is impossible that the whole of the effect of predestination in general should have any cause as coming from us; because whatsoever is in man disposing him towards salvation, is all included under the effect of predestination; even the preparation for grace.⁴¹¹

God is sovereignly in control of all actions, all events, and all circumstances in the universe, by virtue of His perfect knowledge. There is no such thing as contingent knowledge for God. God does not learn, therefore, He does not look at the time bound universe and discover what secondary agents will do. God, in one intuitive act, knows all things and for God "to know" is "to will." He is most simple and sublime, knowing all things.

PERFECTION (Matthew 5:48; Psalm 18:30)

Therefore you be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

⁴¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.23 a.5 resp.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

Perfection is the highest sense of completion (τελειος, teleios), or fullness of qualities and characteristics. There are three principles involved when speaking of the perfection of God. (1) God, as the greatest conceivable being, must have all of the perfections that reason and Scripture demand. (2) Perfection in God is that of eminence, there is no limit in greatness in the divine perfections. (3) These perfections are harmonious and consistent in God.⁴¹² The perfection of God is absolute, total, and infinite. It is to be flawless in any real or perceived way. Perfection is eminence in the highest sense. Lower states of perfection testify of the ground of perfection, God Himself. Perfection is the highest state in actuality. Aquinas writes, “Created things are then called perfect, when from potentiality they are brought into actuality, this word *perfect* signifies whatever is not wanting in actuality.”⁴¹³ Since God is pure actuality (His aseity), He is also absolutely perfect. Scripture reveals that God is perfect in...

- (1) His ways (Psalm 18:30)
- (2) His works (Matthew 5:48; Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Samuel 22:31, 33)
- (3) His knowledge (Job 36:4, 37:16)
- (4) His laws (Psalm 19:7; James 1:25)
- (5) His faithfulness (Isaiah 25:1)
- (6) His will (Romans 12:2)
- (7) His grace, “gifts” (James 1:17)

“The biblical authors imply God’s perfection,” Jay Richards writes, “when they praise him superlatively: ‘Great is our LORD and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure’ (Ps 147:5).”⁴¹⁴ Perfection is the adjective that describes all of God’s attributes.

⁴¹² See Francis J. Hall, *The Being and Attributes of God*, Dogmatic Theology, 293.

⁴¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.4 a.1 ad.1.

⁴¹⁴ Jay W. Richards. *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition. 2003), Loc., 297-299

SECTION III

Communicating God

CHAPTER NINE

God's Missional Attributes: What Is Communicated in the Gospel

Love is the primary attribute of God, and the heart of the Gospel message is that God has effectively shown His love by a real identification of Himself with our limitations and sorrows.

– Francis J. Hall, *The Incarnation*

The gospel shows more of the Divine attributes, and so is a fuller manifestation of the Divine plenitude of perfection.

– William Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed*

The Gospel, while revealing the character and attributes of God, makes known the great relating to the Lord Jesus Christ.

– W. E. Vine, *Collected Writings*

Truth is Justice's handmaid, freedom is its child, peace is its companion, safety walks in its steps, victory follows in its train; it is the brightest emanation from the Gospel; it is the attribute of God.

– Sydney Smith in Perry Tanksley, *To Love is to Give*

God's **missional attributes** are those qualities that are expressed either implicitly or explicitly in the Gospel of Christ. These qualities are also called the communicable attributes. These attributes are “communicated”

to creation and are manifest in the constitution of man. All men are capable of expressing some of these attributes, such as love and goodness. The *missional attributes* are best understood by the “way of eminence.” People can manifest love, but God is perfect love and the ground of love. A man can be good, but God is perfect and infinite goodness.

LOVE (1 John 4:8-9; Isaiah 63:9)

By this the love of God is revealed in us: that God sent his one and only Son into the world in order that we may live through him (1 John 4:9).

The love of God is quintessentially revealed in the coming of Christ into the world (John 3:16). This love is proclaimed in the preaching of the Gospel and displayed in the work of the cross. “*But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). John affirms in his first epistle, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). The declaration that “God is love,” John R. W. Stott writes, “is the most comprehensive and sublime of all biblical affirmations about God’s being.”⁴¹⁵ This is the most clearly predicated attribute of God in all of Scripture. This attribute grounds the work of the triune God in salvation. Alva J. McClain defines the attribute of love as “that in God which moves Him to give Himself and His gifts spontaneously, voluntarily, righteously, and eternally, for the good of personal beings, regardless of their merit or response.”⁴¹⁶

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the strongest expression of the love of God. “*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:38–39). All the aspects of salvation, from predestination and election to glorification (the *ordo salutis*, “order of salvation”), are the consequence of the love of God for

⁴¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, vol. 19, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 161.

⁴¹⁶ Alva J. McClain, *God and Revelation* (Teachers Annotated Syllabus). Annotated and Revised by John C. Whitcomb. (Indianapolis: Christian Workman Schools of Theology, 1993), 64.

His people. “*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (Titus 3:4–5, NKJV cf. Romans 8:28–37). The love of God is the unconditional love of will and volition. It is not a love of emotion or sentiment. The love of God is that undeserved and unmerited love that gives value to the object loved. It is love regardless of the intrinsic value of the beloved. This is most profoundly evidenced in the cross of Christ. It was “*while we were still sinners*” and unlovable that God demonstrated His love for us. This is what is called *αγαπη* (agape) love. Agape is the Greek word used for the love that God demonstrates and possesses, which is opposed to mere “family love,” “brotherly love,” or “romantic love.”

The sanctity of human life comes from two very important principles—people made in the image of God and people as objects of God’s love. Often times in life the value of something does not come from its intrinsic properties but from its extrinsic relationship (i.e., as an object of someone’s particular love). Human life is sacred because people are the objects of God’s love. With the *Imago Dei* (image of God) marred and the race fallen, the whole human race could have easily been discarded by God. All people could have been regarded as worthless and relegated to an eternal hell. This would have been an expression of God’s righteousness and justice. God was never obligated to save Adam or his posterity. “*But God*” (Ephesians 2:4) sent His Son as a propitiation for the sin of the world (1 John 2:2) and reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18–19). This is love. God’s love is giving; it seeks the good of its object (Deuteronomy 7:7–8). God’s love is an act of the Divine will that initiates sacrifice (1 John 4:10). God’s love is righteous (Psalm 11:7). God loves what is right, and God’s love paid the price for sin so that the ungodly could be justified (cf. Romans 4). There are four statements in the New Testament concerning what God is in substance and nature, they are...

- (1) He is “spirit” (John 4:24)
- (2) He is “light” (1 John 1:5)
- (3) He is “a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29)
- (4) He is “Love”

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GOODNESS (Mark 10:18; Nahum 1:7; Exodus 33:19; Psalm 34:8)

So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18).

The word “goodness” in the New Testament is the Greek word αγαθος (agathōs). It is used 101 times and means “goodness as a quality of character that results in the benefit and profit of others.” William Shedd writes, “The goodness of God is the divine essence viewed as energizing benevolently and kindly toward the creature.”⁴¹⁷ The antonyms of αγαθος (agathōs) are πονηρός (ponērós) “evil” and ἀφιλάγαθος (aphilágathos) “not-loving-good.” The word is translated in 2 Timothy 3:3 as “no interest for what is good” (LEB), “despisers of good” (NKJV), “not loving good” (ESV). The idea of the goodness of God is benevolent love. Love and benevolence are both synonyms of goodness. Love is the disposition “to do good,” and benevolence is the wishing of well-being, which is the Jewish concept of “Shalom” or peace. God delights to do good, the highest good to His creatures. Goodness as belonging to God is perfect and infinite goodness.

God is the fount and source of all varieties of goodness: moral, metaphysical, and aesthetic. Goodness is rooted and grounded in God Himself.⁴¹⁸ As previously mentioned, Plato defined God as the “cause of all good in creation.” Biblically, the goodness of God is said to “lead people to repentance” and faith in Jesus Christ. Paul writes, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4, NKJV). The word “lead” is the Greek word αγω (agō) and is a present active indicative verb. This verb is a conative⁴¹⁹ present and carries the idea of intention. It is present and denotes continuous action. The goodness of God is continually intended to lead sinners to repentance and faith in Christ. “Lead” agō (αγω) is modified by the preposition εις (eis), which

⁴¹⁷ William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 304.

⁴¹⁸ Euthyphro’s Dilemma: Is something good because God approves it, or does God approve it because it’s good? Answer: God’s commands are reflections of His character and nature. God acts consistently with His nature: God is goodness. He is not subject to it nor is it arbitrary.

⁴¹⁹ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Logos Bible Software, 1919), 880 and R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 139.

is a marker of result or cause.⁴²⁰ God's goodness is intended to lead to repentance and faith. This goodness of God is intrinsic in the Gospel and is intended to lead to a positive response to the Gospel message. God's goodness is undoubtedly missional and evangelical. The Psalmist declares, "Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, for his loyal love is forever" (Psalm 106:1). "You are good and do good" (Psalm 119:68a). God's common grace and general beneficence to all mankind is declared in Scripture. "And yet he did not leave himself without witness by doing good, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying you with food and your hearts with gladness" (Acts 14:17). The goodness of God may be a designation for all of His attributes. God is good in His character as holy, true, and righteous. God is good to His creatures as loving, gracious, and merciful. All of which are the "good news" of the Gospel of Christ.

GRACE (Psalm 86:15; Psalm 116:5; Ephesians 1:6-7; Ephesians 2:7; 1 Peter 5:10)

Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:5–7, NKJV).

The phrase the "grace of God" χάρις (charis) with του θεου (tou theou) is used in the New Testament 24 times (NKJV). The word "grace" χάρις (charis) is used 155 times in the New Testament and 158 times in the Septuagint (LXX). It is the primary translation of the Hebrew word חֵן (hēn), which means "favor" or "grace." Traditionally, grace has been defined as "unmerited favor." It is wholly unearned and undeserved and an expression of Divine compassion, mercy, and love. The grace of God is the underlying principle in the Gospel. The grace of God is a vast subject. It is no doubt a limitless fount of hope and praise for those who have experienced the grace of God, as it is written, "to the praise of the glory of His grace." The

⁴²⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 782, see also David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of Romans 1-8*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2008), 132.

grace of God is connected with the Biblical doctrine of predestination and election. Aquinas writes, “predestination, in its proper sense, is a certain Divine preordination from eternity of those things which are to be done in time by the grace of God.”⁴²¹ William Shedd comments, “the grace of God manifested in the purpose of election is irresistible—not in the sense that it cannot be opposed in any degree, but in the sense that it cannot be overcome.”⁴²² R. C. Sproul writes, “God’s election is sovereign. It does not rest upon the foreseen decisions or responses of human beings. Indeed, it sees those decisions as flowing from the sovereign grace of God.”⁴²³

Lewis Sperry Chafer has made the most significant contribution to the understanding of God’s grace. Chafer in his *Systematic Theology* references “the Grace of God” 131 times. Apart from Chafer’s volume on *Grace*, he has pointed out thirty-three specific works of grace, which he entitled “*The Riches of Divine Grace*” in his *Systematic Theology*.⁴²⁴ Chafer writes, “The thirty-three divine undertakings in the salvation of a soul, which are here designated as *the riches of grace*, represent all that God can do to satisfy His own infinite love for the sinner.”⁴²⁵ Under the heading “*In the Eternal Plan of God*,” Chafer lists five truths.

- (1) **Foreknowledge:** God’s gracious and specific love of those known before the foundation of the world (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:2, 20)
- (2) **Predestination:** God’s gracious ordering and directing of those foreknown to a specific end (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:6-7)
- (3) **Election:** the selection of those foreknown and predestined (Romans 11:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2; Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1)
- (4) **Choosing:** the gracious choice of individuals, apart from any merit, to be recipients of salvation and adoption in Christ (Ephesians 1:4)

⁴²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.24 a.1 resp.

⁴²² William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 332.

⁴²³ Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, Ch. 57.

⁴²⁴ Chafer, vol. 3, *Systematic Theology*, 225-265.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

- (5) **Calling:** the specific inward call of the Holy Spirit that effectually works faith in those elected and chosen before time began (1 Thessalonians 5:24; Romans 8:30)

These truths point to the fact that salvation is of the LORD and solely by grace. As the Apostle Paul stated through the Spirit, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8–9, NKJV).

The riches of God’s grace will be ultimately experienced and displayed in the glorification of the believer when we inherit our eternal home. It will be a real place (John 14:1-6) and will be a real space/time existence with God face-to-face (Revelation 21-22). Aquinas writes concerning the grace of God.

The grace of God is life everlasting. For we have proved that man’s happiness consists in seeing God, which is called life everlasting; and we are said to obtain this by God’s grace alone, because that vision surpasses the faculty of every creature, and it is impossible to attain thereto except by God’s gift; and when such things are obtained by a creature, it is put down to God’s grace.⁴²⁶

RIGHTEOUSNESS (Psalm 11: 7; Psalm 89:14; Psalm 45:6; Romans 3:25)

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right (Genesis 18:25, NKJV).

The term *righteousness* means conformity to a right or just standard, uprightness, or being right. It is being right in both character and conduct. God is essentially right and just in all He *is* and *does*. Rolland McCune writes, “*Righteousness in God*, then, is that perfection of His character or that aspect of His holiness in which His actions and attitudes are always in conformity with His own perfect being or nature and by which He demands absolute conformity to perfect right in others.”⁴²⁷ A. H. Strong defines

⁴²⁶ Aquinas, vol. 3, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 125-126.

⁴²⁷ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels* (Allen Park, MI:

the righteousness of God as His “transitive holiness.”⁴²⁸ Something that is transitive requires an object; therefore, the righteousness of God is His objective holiness, that which is directed and expressed.

In Greek and Hebrew, the terms for righteousness and justice are of the same cognate word group: Hebrew צְדָקָה, (ṣēdeq), and Greek δικαιοσύνη, (dikaiōs). Righteousness is being just and right both intrinsically and extrinsically. The Gospel truth of “justification by faith (alone)” is founded upon and related to the righteousness of God. It is God’s righteousness and justice in which He Himself satisfies the righteous demands of the Law and then imputes His righteousness to those who receive Christ by faith. “*But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe*” (Romans 3:21–22, NKJV). The Gospel, the article upon which the Church stands or falls, is the imputation of God’s very righteousness, legally and forensically, “to all” and “on all” who believe (cf. Romans 3:22, NJKV).

HOLINESS (Isaiah 6:1-5; 1 Peter 1:15-16)

But as the one who called you is holy, you yourselves be holy in all your conduct, for it is written, “You will be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15–16). And the one called to the other and said, “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts! The whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3).

The holiness of God refers to the absolute goodness and moral purity of God’s being and disposition and it signifies both a positive and negative aspect. Positively, it is intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsically, God is necessary moral goodness and righteousness, and extrinsically, He is good, righteous, and just toward His creatures. Negatively, God’s moral goodness and righteousness remain infinitely separate, untainted, and unpolluted by the created order. He is so holy that He cannot even look on evil. “*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing*” (Habakkuk 1:13, NIV). Francis Hall writes, “The holiness of God is His self affirming purity; the attribute which guards the distinction between

Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 263.

⁴²⁸ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 290.

God and the creature. It is the ground of reverence and adoration.”⁴²⁹ Not only is the holiness of God the ground of Christian worship, but it is also the ground of judgment and retribution of the wicked, “*a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*” For “*it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:27, 31, NIV).

The holiness of God is a preeminent attribute; it separates the created order from the Creator. Biblically, holiness is attributed to God in various ways.

- (1) God’s **habitation** is holy (Deuteronomy 26:15)
- (2) His **throne** is holy (Psalm 47:8)
- (3) His **Spirit** is holy (Psalm 51:11)
- (4) His **arm** is holy (Psalm 98:1)
- (5) **He is Holy** (Psalm 99:9)
- (6) His **word** is holy (Psalm 105:42)
- (7) His **name** is holy (57:15)
- (8) **He is thrice Holy** (Isaiah 6:3)

The English word “holy” etymologically carries the idea of “wholeness.” That which is wholly pure morally and that which is wholly set apart or devoted to God, holiness or wholeness of character and consecration. Biblically, the word has the basic idea of being set apart. The Hebrew קָדָשׁ (kadesh) “separateness” and the Greek ἅγιος (agios) “set apart” carry this connotation. The holiness of God is also understood in reference to His uniqueness. “*Who is like you among the gods, Yahweh? Who is like you—glorious in holiness, awesome in praiseworthy actions, doing wonders*” (Exodus 15:11). This is the “glorious-holiness,” or “majesty-holiness” of God.⁴³⁰

The holiness or separateness of God is testified to throughout Scripture. God is presented in Scripture as,

- (1) **Absolutely** separate and above all created things and beings (Psalm 99:1-3; Isaiah 57:15)
- (2) **Absolutely** clean and morally pure (Psalm 24:3-4)

⁴²⁹ Francis J. Hall, *Theological Outlines*, Vol. 1: *The Doctrine of God* (Milwaukee, WI: The Young Churchman Co., 1905), 121.

⁴³⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 73

- (3) **Absolutely** separate from evil (Psalm 5:4)
- (4) **Absolutely** holy in His character (1 Peter 1:15-16)

The **missional attributes** of God are communicated in and declared through Gospel preaching. These attributes as they are in God are perfect, infinite, and absolute. Mankind may share in these attributes by virtue of their faith and obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The *missional attributes* of God should spur the believer on to be godly in every way. Evangelicalism is at the heart of the nature of God. God is missional in His attributes and Christians should live a missional life.

CHAPTER TEN

Communicating God's Being – The Names of God

The One who is, is the principle of all names applied to God; for comprehending all in itself, it contains existence itself as an infinite and indeterminate sea of substance.

– St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*

The various names of God represent his many praiseworthy attributes, we hallow his name when we honor some aspect of his character.

– James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*

God is known through the divine names as their principal and cause.

– St Thomas Aquinas, *De Divinis Nominibus*

All the authority that is in the name of God has been transferred to the name of Jesus.

– R. T. Kendall, *Understanding Theology*

The names of God that are found in Scripture are not mere human conceptions. These names are revelatory and communicative of the divine essence itself. To the ancient Hebrew, names were thought of as disclosing the attributes and characteristics of a person. This is especially true with the names of God found in the text of Scripture. The designations of God

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in the sacred text are His self-disclosures. They reveal His nature and character. God has revealed these names in order to reveal something of Himself. Charles Ryrie writes, “The many names of God in the Scripture provide additional revelation of His character. These are not mere titles assigned by people but, for the most part, His own descriptions of Himself. As such they reveal aspects of His character.”⁴³¹

In the ancient Near East, a name signified something important about an individual. Within that ancient culture, a name was seen as equivalent to the person who it signified and identified. This is the fundamental reason why the name of the Lord can be praised. “*Let his name, the name of God, be blessed throughout the ages, for the wisdom and the power are his*” (Daniel 2:20). A nominal designation expressed all that a person was or was hoped to be, especially in the case of a parent naming a child. In Scripture, a person’s name was changed due to an encounter with God and the subsequent impact of that confrontation. Gerhard von Rad writes,

According to ancient ideas, a name was not just “noise and smoke:” instead, there was a close and essential relationship between it and its subject. The subject is in the name, and on that account the name carries with it a statement about the nature of its subject or at least about the power appertaining to it.⁴³²

The following treatment of the names of God will be composed of two main divisions. The meaning of the name, which reveals the character and grace of God in relationship to His creatures, and the personal application of those names to the one who has entered into covenant relationship with Christ by faith alone. The names of God are a source of great **hope** for the believer in that the character of God is further revealed and experienced in the walk of **faith** in this life. “**Faith, hope and love**” remain until faith becomes sight and hope becomes possession. Love will never give way because it is the underlying principle of all reality expressed in the nature of God. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Consider the love of God, which accentuates and actualizes each name.

⁴³¹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 51.

⁴³² Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*. 2 Vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 1:181-182.

THE PRINCIPAL NAMES— ELOHIM-GOD, YAHWEH-LORD, ADONAI-LORD

ELOHIM (EL) – GOD (Genesis 1:1; 17:3; Exodus 3:1; 6:3; Deuteronomy 5:26; Psalm 7:9)

In the beginning, God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

Meaning: The word is the plural form of *El* (God); it signifies the Mighty One, the Strong One, the Powerful Creator, and it is used where the creative power and omnipotence of God are in view. Its plural form may be interpreted as a plural of majesty, but more likely, it indicates a plural of personality. The Hebrew language has three ideas concerning number: singular (one), dual (two), and plural (three or more). Mal Couch comments, “*El* - God, *oh* - exists, *im* - signifies a plural. Thus, ‘God exists in plural.’ This opens the door for the Trinity of the God of the Old Testament. The word is used 2,500 times in the Old Testament.”⁴³³ The word *Elohim*, Francis Hall writes “is clearly employed in a monotheistic sense in Genesis and other portions of the Old Testament. It may be interpreted as a plural of majesty, indicating the manifold greatness of God, or as foreshadowing the later revelation of the Trinity.”⁴³⁴ The word signifies the idea of an office. It is synonymous with the notion of a title. For example, who was the fortieth President of the United States? It was President Ronald Reagan. Who is God? The Lord God Yahweh is God.

Personal Application: God, the Powerful Creator, the Strong One is more than able to take care of any issue or problem that comes your way. The one who created the universe and put the stars in their place is there to hold you. He can hem you in, before and behind, with His hands and uphold you by His power (Psalm 139).

⁴³³ Mal Couch, *Messianic Systematic Theology of the Old Testament* (Clifton, TX: Scofield Ministries Publishing, 2010), 81.

⁴³⁴ Francis J. Hall, *The Being and Attributes of God, Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 227-228.

YAHWEH – LORD (6,805x) (Genesis 2:4; 4:1; Exodus 3:14-15; 6:3; 1 Samuel 12:22; Isaiah 42:8)

And God said to Moses, “I am that I am...” So you must say to the Israelites, “Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my remembrance from generation to generation” (Exodus 3:14–15).

Meaning: The word means, the Existing One, the Self-Existent and Eternal One. The primary thought is of existence, Being, Necessary Being. J. O. Buswell noted that this word is the third person singular imperfect of the Hebrew verb “to be” and therefore means “He who continuously is.”⁴³⁵ The name denotes being itself, the Being One or the Eternal One. It carries the idea of self-existence and aseity. Thomas Aquinas writes, “The divine being is not a being received in anything, but He is His own subsistent being.”⁴³⁶ This means that God is the explanation for Himself. He looks to no other, He exists “in and of” Himself. He is the One who was, the One who is, and the One who is to come (Revelation 1:8). All verb tenses of past, present, and future must be used to express the self-existence of “I am.” This does not mean that He is self-caused, but that He is the uncaused cause and ground of all Being. The attribute of Aseity is grounded in this name, “I am the Being One,” “egō eimi o ōn,” “εγω ειμι ο ων” (Exodus 3:14, LXX). “In Him was life” (John 1:4). The name Yahweh was reckoned as the most sacred, most holy of divine names by the Jews and was never pronounced by them. The name Adonai was used in its place.

Personal Application: The “I Am,” the ground of all Being, not only created you but also desires a relationship with you. Yahweh is the covenant and personal name of God. If you are “in Christ” (Colossians 1:2), you are also in covenant relationship with God. It was Jesus Christ, the God-Man, who gave His blood for the new covenant, which the Church shares in its blessings. God is a covenant-keeping God. He has fulfilled his promise to Abraham to make him a “blessing” (Genesis

⁴³⁵ James O. Buswell Jr., *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*. Vol 1. Club Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 36.

⁴³⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.7 a.1 resp.

12:1-3), and He will fulfill His “word of promise” to His children as he did for Abraham (Romans 9:9). This means that we can expect that Christ will come again; we can expect that Bible prophecy will be fulfilled. We can expect that God will fulfill the promises that he made to Israel concerning the Millennium, and we the Church will rule and reign with Christ. This hope is grounded in the “I Am.” He is ever-present, watching over His word to fulfill it. Take the promises of God that He has made to His Church and hope in them. Ultimately, your hope is “the hope of glory,” “Christ in you” (Colossians 1:27), a hope “reserved for you in heaven,” (Colossians 1:5), and “a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). No more pain, no more sorrow; Yahweh will “wipe away every tear” (Revelation 21:4). And the Church has a “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) that will usher in the fulfillment of God’s promises.

ADONAI – LORD (Genesis 15:2; Exodus 4:13; Joshua 3:11; 1 Kings 22:6; Zechariah 9:4)

The LORD (YAHWEH) said to my Lord (ADONAI), “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Psalm 110:1, NKJV).

Meaning: The word *Adonai* means possessor or ruler of all mankind. Further, Adonai designates the almighty Master and Lord. “It implies ‘to judge, to rule.’ It refers to the ‘one who owns the land, property.’ It is used as a description of God but also it is a Messianic term as used in Psalm 110:1.”⁴³⁷ Adonai “also comes under what scholars call a ‘plural of majesty,’ indicating diversity within oneness.”⁴³⁸ As with Elohim, Adonai foreshadows the unfolding of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Personal Application: Adonai is the Lord; He is the ruler and master of all creation. As believers, our relationship to Adonai is one of servant. He is master and believers are slaves. God, when addressing the children of Israel, frequently used this name for Himself. In the New Testament the word is κυριος (kyrios). Jesus Christ is designated as the Lord on almost every page of the New Testament, and believers are called

⁴³⁷ Couch, *Messianic Systematic Theology of the Old Testament*, 81.

⁴³⁸ Bloesch, *God, the Almighty*, 168.

His slaves (Cf. Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1). When reading the Bible and coming across the word “Lord,” we should pause for a moment and search our hearts to see if we are truly submitting to the lordship of Christ. Some believers go many years serving their self-interests not realizing that carnality costs fruitful service in this life and rewards in the next (1 Corinthians 3:1-14).

“EL” COMBINATIONS

EL BETHEL – GOD OF THE HOUSE OF GOD (Genesis 31:13; 35:7)

I am the God of Bethel where you anointed a stone pillar, where you made a vow to me. Now get up, go out from this land and return to the land of your birth (Genesis 31:13). And he built an altar there and called the place El-Bethel, for there God had appeared to him when he fled before his brother (Genesis 35:7).

Meaning: El Bethel was the name given by Jacob to the place where God had appeared to him. Jacob had two very significant and life changing encounters with God at El Bethel. In Genesis 28:12–15, Jacob dreamed of a ladder and witnessed the angels of God “going up and going down on it.” In the dream, Yahweh appeared to Jacob and reconfirmed the promise of the land (of Israel), the “blessing” to all peoples and the countless descendants that the Lord had promised his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac (cf. Abrahamic covenant: Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; 22:15-18, also confirmed to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-5).⁴³⁹ In response to the dream and the Divine visitation Jacob declared, “This is nothing else than **the house of God** and this is **the gate of heaven**.” In Genesis 35:9–15, at Bethel, El Shaddai blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel. He also reconfirmed the Abrahamic covenant there to Jacob. Bethel means “the House of God,” so El Bethel literally means “God of the House of God.” It is the place where God appeared to Jacob and changed his life. God changed

⁴³⁹ See Mal Couch, *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 27-32; 72-73; 93-96; 110-113; 121-123; 193-197; 197-203; 207-210; 211-212; 278-283; 291-292; 297-300; 317-319; 332-359; 412-417.

his name there. The heavens were opened there. The biblical portrait here is too beautiful to paint with words. Further, consider that Christ referred to Himself as this ladder. *“And he said to him, ‘Truly, truly I say to all of you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man’”*(John 1:51). Bethel is the place where El dwells. He is present in the House of God.

Personal Application: Jacob’s Ladder is Jesus Christ. He is the “way” (John 14:6) to the House of El. In His Father’s house there are many “dwelling places” (John 14:2); He has gone to prepare “a place” (John 14:3) for His Church. He will also come again and receive his Church to Himself in the rapture (John 14:1-3). He is the door (John 10:9) to heaven. All who wish to enter must enter by Him (Matthew 7:13-14). We can know El by the provision of the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:13-15). Through the power of the cross and the washing of the Spirit, believers are changed (Titus 3:5-7). Like Jacob, believers get a new name (Revelation 2:17; 3:12), and God changes their character. Jacob, although he was a servant of God, still possessed many ungodly characteristics. His name fit him he was a deceiver. But El Shaddai blessed him and changed his character. El Shaddai appeared to Jacob and reminded him that El was a promise-keeping God.

EL ELYON – GOD, THE MOST HIGH GOD (Genesis 14:18–22)

And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand” (Genesis 14:19–20).

Meaning: El Elyon “speaks of God as ‘high over all,’ or ‘above all.’”⁴⁴⁰

The word speaks of His exalted nature as Most High. “Elyon” is the superlative; He is God, God Most High and the Exalted One.

Personal Application: There is no one higher or more exalted than El Elyon. His glory is above all creation. *“Be exalted above the heavens, O God. Let your glory be above all the earth”* (Psalm 57:5). He is greater than all things. He is greater than our sin. John writes in his

⁴⁴⁰ Couch, *Messianic Systematic Theology of the Old Testament*, 83.

first epistle concerning the comfort that a believer can possess when the truth of El Elyon is known. He writes, *“If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things”* (1 John 3:20). For John, the answer for a believer struggling with guilt is the recognition that God is “greater” than our own self-condemning hearts. The word “condemn” here in the passage means to have “knowledge against” καταγινώσκω (kataginōskō). Self-condemnation can exist because of present sin or past sin or even imagined sin. But John reminds us that God also “knows all things” γινώσκω πας (ginōskō pas). So, even in the event when we have “knowledge against” ourselves, God knows all things and is greater than our self-condemning heart. *“What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us”* (Romans 8:31). The answer is no one, not even ourselves! This is the comfort of El Elyon.

El Elyon is also greater than our enemy, the Devil, who seeks to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). *“The one who is in you [El Elyon] is greater than the one who is in the world [the devil, sin, et cetera.]”* (1 John 4:4). The knowledge of El Elyon is also a comfort in the believer’s security. In salvation, El Elyon holds the believer in His hand. No one can cause the loss of his or her own salvation, not even the will of the individual. It is held by some that the will⁴⁴¹ of humans is somehow greater than God Himself. Jesus says, *“And I give them eternal life, and they will*

⁴⁴¹ The notion of “free will” as taught today in the Church is unbiblical. Libertarian free-will holds that people have the power to choose contrary to their nature and desires. It is called the power of contrary choice. Since the Fall and by nature, as Adam’s offspring, people have lost their liberum arbitrium, “liberty of will,” and are now in the state of non-posse non-peccare, people are “unable not to sin.” If people, in their fallen state, are “unable not to sin,” then where is free will? Jonathan Edwards pointed out that people have natural limitations and moral limitations. Fallen man can no more flap his arms and fly than he can choose contrary to his sin nature. He is in the state of non-posse non-peccare. As Jesus put it, “And this is the judgment: that the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). It is commonly thought that man must be able to choose “contrary to his nature” in order to really be free. It seems that no one has this kind of freedom, not even God. God cannot choose to lie or sin and He is most free, further, glorified human-beings will no longer be able to choose to sin in the eternal state. It seems that the compatibilist view of free-will is the most biblical and rational view. A compatibilistic view of freedom is “the unencumbered ability to do as one desires,” in this manner mankind may be said to have free-will. Conversely, there is

never perish forever, and no one will seize them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can seize them from the Father's hand” (John 10:28–29).

El Elyon is the Most High God. He is sovereign and He is in control. That is His nature; He is God the Most High God. There is definitely no “pagan particle” or “quisling quark” in the entire universe that is outside of the sovereign control and will of El Elyon. R. C. Sproul elaborates, “If there is one maverick molecule in the universe running around free of God’s sovereignty then there is no guarantee that any promise God has ever made will come to pass. That one molecule may be the very thing that disrupts God’s eternal plan. . . . If God is not sovereign, then God is not God. A non-sovereign God is no God at all.”⁴⁴² Take some time and rest under the sovereign hand of El Elyon. *“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10).*

EL OLAM – THE GOD OF ETERNITY (Genesis 21:33)

And he planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of Yahweh, the everlasting God (Genesis 21:33).

O Lord, you have been our help in all generations. Before the mountains were born and you brought forth the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God (Psalm 90:1–2).

Meaning: El Olam is “a natural derivation of the repeated idea that God exists eternally. It occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible, in Genesis 21:33, where it is in apposition to Yahweh.”⁴⁴³ The name El Olam is translated as “the Everlasting God.” The thought behind this name was not only the eternal duration of God (ontologically speaking), but also His everlasting faithfulness (His covenant faithfulness). El Olam is a faithful and covenant-keeping God to all generations. Abraham

no such freedom to do other than what you desire, according to nature. For, I would love to have the power of self-flight but my nature constrains me!

⁴⁴² R. C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 189.

⁴⁴³ Dan McClellan, “Names of God,” in *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

calls on *Yahweh*, “the Everlasting God” the one who keeps His word (Genesis 21:33).

Personal Application: El Olam’s nature is one of self-existence and Pure Actuality. The Everlasting God is also eternally faithful. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and all the prophets can testify to the faithfulness of El Olam. The Psalmist proclaimed, “*Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies*” (Psalm 36:5, NIV). Even in the mist of pain, Jeremiah reminded himself of *Yahweh*’s faithfulness. “*This I have reminded myself, therefore I will hope. The loyal love of Yahweh does not cease; his compassions do not come to an end. They are new in the morning, great is your faithfulness*” (Lamentations 3:21–23). Whatever you may be going through, remember, “*LORD, you are my God ... in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago*” (Isaiah 25:1, NIV). In all things God is faithful; whatever the circumstance God is faithful. He can take the bad and cause it to work for good on behalf of His people (Romans 8:28).

EL RO’I – GOD OF SEEING OR GOD WHO SEES ME (Genesis 16:13)

So she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, “You are El-Roi,” for she said, “Here I have seen after he who sees me” (Genesis 16:13).

Meaning: The name El Roi appears only once in the Bible, Genesis 16:13. Hagar, after fleeing from Sarah found shelter and sustenance from the hand of El Roi, the God who saw her. It was at the spring by the road of Shur. At that spring, *Yahweh* appeared to Hagar and provided for her. From that time forward, the spring was called Beer-Lahai-Roi, the “well of the living one who sees.” It was at Beer-Lahai-Roi that God saw and responded to Hagar’s destitute and impoverished state.

Personal Application: The hope of El Roi is found in the fact that He knows where His people are and where they will be. When believers go through tough times, it is easy to forget, but El Roi knows and sees; He is the God of seeing. The fact that El Roi knows and sees is a great comfort to believers because it implies that He will also act, provide,

and rescue. “*And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom*” (2 Timothy 4:18, NKJV). “*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.... Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion*” (2 Timothy 4:17, NKJV). “*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 15:13).

EL SHADDAI – GOD OF THE MOUNTAINS, OR GOD ALMIGHTY (Genesis 17:1; Exodus 6:3; Ruth 1:20; Job 5:17; Psalm 68:14; Isaiah 13:6; Joel 1:15; Numbers 24:4, 16; Isaiah 13:6; Ezekiel 1:24; Joel 1:15; Psalm 68:15; 91:1; Job 5:17–40:2; Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; Exodus 6:3; Ezekiel 10:5; Job 8:5; 13:3; 15:25)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old Yahweh appeared to Abram. And he said to him, “I am El-Shaddai; walk before me and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1).

“Now the advisers of the king of Syria said to him: “Their God is a god of the mountains. That’s why they overpowered us...” (1 Kings 20:23, NET).

Meaning: The word *Shaddai* comes from the word “shad” which means “mountain” or “mountain range.” The word pictures a mighty conqueror standing on the mountain after the defeat of all his enemies. “Though the derivation of this word is uncertain, the most accepted one is that *shaddai* is connected with an Akkadian word that means “mountain.” Thus this name of God pictures Him as the Almighty One standing on a mountain.”⁴⁴⁴ This name is related to God’s attribute of omnipotence. He is the almighty, the conqueror, the powerful One. The word appears 48 times in the Hebrew Bible and is the third most common epithet used for God. The term is traditionally translated as “God Almighty” based on the Septuagint translation κυριος παντοκράτορος (kyrios pantokratoros), “Lord all-powerful.” It is found in Job 8:5 and Job 15:25. Elsewhere, the LXX translates *Shaddai* with παντοκράτορος (pantokratoros). In Job 21:15 *Shaddai* is translated ικανός (hikanos), the “Sufficient One.” “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord*

⁴⁴⁴ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 52.

God, the one who is and the one who was and the one who is coming, the All-Powerful” (Revelation 1:8).

Personal Application: El Shaddai is the omnipotent God of the universe. He created all things by calling into existence that which was non-existent (Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:3). He can give life to both the physically and spiritually dead. He can regenerate a dead soul (Titus 3:5), and He can resurrect a dead corpse (John 5:28-29). He can call to life anything on behalf of His people. This was Abraham’s experience too. He can give life to a dead womb and He can give life and hope to a dead world. His power was ultimately displayed in the resurrection of Christ (Romans 1:4; Philippians 3:10), the ground of faith, hope, and life. With El Shaddai nothing is impossible, and He can do all things (Luke 1:37).⁴⁴⁵ El Shaddai is also presented in Scripture as the Almighty God who blesses— from the mountain of God blessings flow.⁴⁴⁶ *“Because of the God of your father he will help you and by Shaddai he will bless you with the blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and the womb” (Genesis 49:25).* Call on El Shaddai and He will bless you and keep you. He will cause His face to shine upon on you, and He will be gracious to you (Numbers 6:24).

YAHWEH COMBINATIONS

There are numerous Yahweh combinations in Scripture, too many to explain and expound in this context. These name combinations are further revelation of God’s character and nature. These Yahweh combinations are grounded in the covenant name of God. The name Yahweh, along with these phrases, expresses the intimacy, friendship, and relationship that He has with His people. So, it is natural that Yahweh would be compounded

⁴⁴⁵ Omnipotence does not do the illogical. God is absolutely consistent with His character. All attributes proceed from and are His essence. God does and commands things that are a reflection of His character and nature. Euthyphro has no dilemma either; God’s omnipotence and goodness are an essential aspect of His nature and all things proceed from that nature. He cannot sin and he cannot “make a rock so big that He cannot pick it up.” The One who is omnipotent is also perfect and nonsense does not become Him.

⁴⁴⁶ Consider the many references to “the mountain of God” in Scripture and their significance. See any Bible dictionary on the phrase, “mountain of God.”

with other terms in order to identify and make specific these relationships. To know these names are to know the Lord better. The names of God are more than merely His names or nominal destinations they are the epitome of His nature and activity.⁴⁴⁷

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⁴⁴⁷ Buswell, *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 35.

The Personal Names of God in the Old Testament

<i>Divine Name</i>	<i>English Translation</i>	<i>Biblical Reference</i>
<i>Yahweh El Elohim</i>	The Mighty One, God The LORD	Josh. 22:22
<i>Yahweh Elohim</i>	The LORD God	Gen. 2:4; 3:9-13, 21
<i>Yahweh Elohe Abothechem</i>	The LORD God of Your Fathers	Josh. 18:3
<i>Yahweh El Elyon</i>	The LORD, the Most High God	Gen. 14:22
<i>Yahweh El Emeth</i>	LORD God of Truth/ Faithfulness	Ps. 31:5
<i>Yahweh El Gemuwal</i>	The LORD God of Recompenses	Jer. 51:56
<i>Yahweh Elohim Tsebaoth</i>	LORD God of Hosts	Ps. 59:5
<i>Yahweh Elohe Yeshuathi</i>	LORD God of My Salvation	Ps. 88:1
<i>Yahweh Elohe Yisrael</i>	The LORD God of Israel	Ps. 41:13
<i>Elohim</i>	God	Gen. 1:1; 17:3; Ex. 3:1; 6:3; Deut. 5:26; Ps. 7:9
<i>El Bethel</i>	God of the House of God	Gen. 31:13; 35:7
<i>Elohe Chaseddi</i>	The God of My Mercy	Ps. 59:10
<i>El Elohe Yisrael</i>	God, the God of Israel	Gen. 33:20
<i>El Elyon</i>	The Most High God	Gen. 14:18-22
<i>El Emunah</i>	The Faithful God	Deut. 7:9
<i>El Gibbor</i>	Mighty God	Isa. 9:6
<i>El Hakabodh</i>	The God of Glory	Ps. 29:3
<i>El Hay</i>	The Living God	Josh. 3:10
<i>El Hayyay</i>	God of My Life	Ps. 42:8
<i>Elohim Kedoshim</i>	Holy God	Josh. 24:19
<i>El Kanna, El Kanno</i>	Jealous God	Ex. 20:5; Josh. 24:19
<i>Elohe Mauzi</i>	God of My Strength	Ps. 43:2
<i>Elohim Machase Lanu</i>	God Our Refuge	Ps. 62:8
<i>Eli Malekhi</i>	God My King	Ps. 68:24
<i>El Marom</i>	God Most High	Mic. 6:6
<i>El Nekamoth</i>	God That Avenges	Ps. 18:47
<i>El Nose</i>	God That Forgave	Ps. 99:8
<i>Elohehu Olam</i>	Our Everlasting God	Ps. 48:14
<i>Elohim Ozer Li</i>	God My Helper	Ps. 54:4
<i>El Ro'i</i>	The Seeing God	Gen. 16:13
<i>El Sali</i>	God, My Rock	Ps. 42:9
<i>El Shaddai</i>	Almighty God (God of the Mountain)	Gen. 17:1-2; Ex. 6:3; Job 5:17; Ps. 68:14
<i>Elohim Shophtim ba-arets</i>	God That Judges in the Earth	Ps. 58:11
<i>El Simchath Gili</i>	God My Exceeding Joy	Ps. 43:4

Elohim Tsebaoth	God of Hosts	Ps. 80:7
Elohe Tishuathi	God of My Salvation	Ps. 18:46; 51:14
Elohe Tsadeki	God of My Righteousness	Ps. 4:1
Elohe Yakob	God of Israel	Ps. 20:1
Elohe Yisrael	God of Israel	Ps. 59:5
Adonai	The Lord, Master	Ex. 6:2-3 Gen. 15:2; Ex. 4:13; Josh. 3:11; 1 Kings 22:6; Zech. 9:4
Adonai Yahweh	Lord GOD	Gen. 15:2
Yahweh	The One Who Is, I Am, The Being One (The LORD)	Gen. 2:4; 4:1; Ex. 3:14-15; 6:3; 1 Sam. 12:22; Is. 42:8
Yahweh Hereb Eka Gawat	The LORD the Sword of Your Triumph	Deut. 33:29
Yahweh Eli	The LORD My God	Ps. 18:2
Yahweh Elyon	The LORD Most High	Gen. 14:18-20
Yahweh Gibbor Milhamah	The LORD Mighty in Battle	Ps. 24:8
Yahweh Maginnenu	The LORD Our Defense	Ps. 89:18
Yahweh Goelekh	The LORD Your Redeemer	Isa. 49:26; 60:16
Yahweh Hashopet	The LORD The Judge	Judg. 11:27
Yahweh Hoshiah	O LORD Save	Ps. 20:9
Yahweh Immeka	The LORD Is with You	Judg. 6:12
Yahweh Izuz Wegibbor	The LORD Strong and Mighty	Ps. 24:8
Yahweh Yireh	The LORD Shall See/Provide	Gen. 22:14
Yahweh Kabodhi	The LORD My Glory	Ps. 3:3
Yahweh Kanna Shemo	The LORD Whose Name Is Jealous	Ex. 34:14
Yahweh Keren Yishi	The LORD the Horn of My Salvation	Ps. 18:2
Ha Melekh Yahweh	The LORD The King	Ps. 98:6
Yahweh Machsi	The LORD My Refuge, Dwelling Place	Ps. 91:9
Yahweh Magen	The LORD My Shield	Deut. 33:29
Yahweh Makkeh	The LORD That Smites	Ezek. 7:9
Yahweh Mauzzam	The LORD Their Strength	Ps. 37:39
Yahweh Mauzzi	The LORD My Fortress	Jer. 16:19
Yahweh Melech Olam	The LORD King Forever	Ps. 10:16
Yahweh Mephalti	The LORD My Deliverer	Ps. 18:2
Yahweh Mekaddishkem	The LORD That Sanctifies You	Ex. 31:13
Yahweh Metsudhathi	The LORD My Fortress	Ps. 18:2
Yahweh Mishgabbi	The LORD My High Tower	Ps. 18:2
Yahweh Moshiekh	The LORD Your Savior	Isa. 49:26; 60:16
Yahweh Nissi	The LORD My Banner	Ex. 17:15
Yahweh Ori	The LORD My Light	Ps. 27:1
Yahweh Uzzi	The LORD My Strength	Ps. 28:7
Yahweh Rophe	The LORD My Healer	Ex. 15:26
Yahweh Rohi	The LORD My Shepherd	Ps. 23:1

Yahweh Sabaoth	The LORD of Hosts	1 Sam. 1:3
Yahweh Sali	The LORD My Rock	Ps. 18:2
Yahweh Shalom	The LORD My Peace	Judg. 6:24
Yahweh Shammah	The LORD Is There	Ezek. 48:35
Yahweh Tsidkenu	The LORD Our Righteousness	Jer. 23:6
Yahweh Tsur	O LORD My Strength	Ps. 19:14

(Table 10)⁴⁴⁸

*“For **from** Him and **through** Him and **to** Him are all things,
to God be **glory** for eternity! Amen.”*

⁴⁴⁸ This chart was compiled from numerous sources. The more ‘unfamiliar’ names are adaptations from: Elmer Towns, *My Fathers Names* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991).

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