

The Doctrine of the Trinity

B. B. Warfield and the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity

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Abstract: B. B. Warfield's 1915 *ISBE* article on the Trinity presents the Princeton theologian's mature thinking on the biblical bases and meaning of the doctrine and offers a revisionist interpretation of the personal names of "Father," "Son," and "Spirit." Instead of interpreting the personal names of the Trinity in terms of relations of origin, Warfield argues that the personal names only signify likeness between the persons. The present article locates Warfield's revision within its immediate and broader historical contexts, critically engages Warfield's proposed revision, and discusses the importance of a traditional interpretation of the personal names for Trinitarian theology.

1. INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to say that the doctrine of the Trinity is a biblical doctrine?¹ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield's "Trinity" entry in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* provides an instructive response to this question.² Originally published in 1915, within a largely Ritschlian context that regarded doctrines like the Trinity as later corruptions of an originally undogmatic Christian religion,³ Warfield's article presents his mature account of the biblical bases of the church's Trinitarian confession. Warfield examines the major biblical texts from which the doctrine of the Trinity is drawn. He surveys Old Testament passages commonly adduced by the "older writers" (e.g., Gen 1:26; Num 6:24, 26; Ps 110:1; Prov 8), as well as those adduced by "more recent authors," including texts

¹ Inaugural lecture as Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida, delivered in the Pamplin Chapel on October 20, 2015.

² B. B. Warfield, "Trinity," in vol. 5 of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915), 3012–22. Warfield's "Trinity" article was republished in numerous venues, including: idem, *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford, 1929), 133–72; idem, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1952), 22–59; and idem, *Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 79–116. NB: Throughout the present essay, I have replaced Warfield's original abbreviations of terms with full terms and used contemporary conventions of capitalization.

³ Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 185.

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which portray the operation of a threefold divine cause in “the first ... and the second creation” (e.g., Ps 33:6; Isa 61:1; 63:9–12; Hag 2:5–6).⁴ Warfield also surveys various New Testament passages, considering the contributions of the Synoptic Gospels, the Johannine and Pauline writings, and the Catholic Epistles to Trinitarian doctrine. In each instance, he is careful to acknowledge the distinctive idiom of each New Testament author and to defend the authenticity of key Trinitarian proof-texts (e.g., the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matt 28:19).⁵

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Warfield’s *ISBE* entry on the Trinity is not merely an examination of Trinitarian proof-texts. Over the course of the article, the Princeton theologian offers a series of sophisticated judgments regarding the underlying hermeneutical logic that informs, and is informed by, exegesis of those texts. He discusses the legitimacy of using extra-biblical terminology to convey biblical teaching, the role of reason in Trinitarian doctrine, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments within the Trinitarian economy of revelation, and the variety and significance of biblical terminology in relation to its triune referent. Ultimately, according to Warfield, the *doctrine* of the triune God follows from the *revelation* of the triune God in the *redemptive* work of the triune God. In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity is revealed to us “in the incarnation of God the Son and the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit.”⁶ The New Testament is the literary sign that the early church embraced this revelation of the triune redeemer and the literary expression of its universal Trinitarian consciousness.⁷

Warfield summarizes the main lines of biblical teaching on the Trinity in three points: (1) “there is but one God,” (2) “the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each God,” and (3) “the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each a distinct person.” “When we have said these three things,” he insists, “we have enunciated the doctrine of the Trinity in its completeness.”⁸ Warfield’s summary is unremarkable when placed alongside later Reformed and evangelical syntheses of the doctrine. Wayne Grudem, for example,

⁴ Warfield, “Trinity,” 3014.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3014–20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3015. A few years before the publication of his *ISBE* article, Warfield made a similar methodological point: “The Trinity has been revealed to us only in the manifestations of the Son and Spirit in the persons of Jesus Christ and the Paraclete whom he has sent; and we obtain our only knowledge of the nature of the persons in the Trinity from the manifestations of personality in these persons. It is the Christological conception of personality, in other words, which must rule in constructing our trinitarian conception of person; to this extent our theology must be Christo-centric” (Warfield, review of *Von der Gottheit Christi: Gegen den religiösen Rückschritt in Grüzmachers Dreieinigkeitslehre* by D. Karl Thieme, *Princeton Theological Review* 10 [1912]: 344).

⁷ Warfield, “Trinity,” 3015.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3016.

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basically repeats Warfield's three-point summary in his *Systematic Theology*, as does Robert Reymond.⁹ However, viewed in relation to earlier statements of the doctrine, including those of Warfield's Presbyterian Church,¹⁰ his summary lacks the "completeness" he claims for it. Specifically, Warfield omits any mention of the so-called "personal properties" which distinguish the divine persons from one another, namely, the Father's eternal begetting of the Son ("paternity"), the Son's eternal generation from the Father ("filiation"), and the Spirit's eternal procession from the Father and the Son ("spiration").

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Although his views are not without precedent in North American Presbyterianism and the broader Reformed tradition, this is a somewhat surprising omission to find in an article devoted to the biblical roots of Trinitarian doctrine. The personal properties reflect a broad ecclesiastical consensus in interpreting the revealed names into which we are baptized.¹¹ On the basis of the revealed names "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit," the church confesses that within the eternal depths of God's being there is one who stands in the relation of a father to a son, one who stands in the relation of a son to a father, and one who is breathed forth in the mutual love of the other two. Though somewhat surprising, this omission is not an oversight on Warfield's part. It is the result of reasoned interpretive judgment. According to Warfield, the Son's eternal generation and the Spirit's eternal procession "are not implicates of their designation as Son and Spirit."¹²

The purpose in what follows is to consider Warfield's proposed revision to the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. The discussion will proceed in four steps. First, we will summarize Warfield's biblical argument against the personal properties. Second, we will locate Warfield's argument within the historical-theological trajectory of which it is a part. Third, we will respond to Warfield's argument by pointing to patterns of biblical teaching

⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 226; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), ch. 8. A similar summary appears in Roger Nicole, "The Meaning of the Trinity," in *Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2002), 389.

¹⁰ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 2.3; Westminster Larger Catechism, Question & Answer 9–10.

¹¹ Basil of Caesarea: "I think there is no doctrine in the gospel of our salvation more important than faith in the Father and the Son ... we have been sealed in the Father and the Son through the grace received in baptism. Hence when he [Eunomius] dares to deny these terms, he simultaneously takes exception to the whole power of the gospels, proclaiming a Father who has not begotten and a Son who was not begotten" (*Against Eunomius*, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011], 2.22). On the place of the doctrine of eternal generation in Pro-Nicene theology, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236 *et passim*.

¹² Warfield, "Trinity," 3020.

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that challenge his interpretation and by addressing what seems to be Warfield's primary worry regarding eternal generation and eternal procession. Fourth and finally, our discussion will conclude with some observations on the importance of the traditional interpretation of the revealed names for Trinitarian theology.

2. WARFIELD'S REVISION IN ITS IMMEDIATE HISTORICAL CONTEXT



We may appreciate more fully the nature of Warfield's proposed revision of Trinitarian doctrine by comparing his summary of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity with that of Charles Hodge, Warfield's predecessor in the Chair of Theology at Princeton. Hodge summarizes the "biblical form of the doctrine" in five points.¹³

Hodge's first three points are nearly identical to the three points we find in Warfield: (1) "There is one only living and true God." (2) "In the Bible, all divine titles and attributes are ascribed equally to the Father, Son, and Spirit." (3) "[T]he Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons."¹⁴

Hodge's fourth and fifth points include affirmations absent from Warfield's summary. (4) Hodge's fourth point affirms ordered modes of being and operation within the Trinity: "In the Holy Trinity there is a subordination of the Persons as to the mode of subsistence and operation."¹⁵ (5) Hodge's fifth point then specifies the nature of these ordered modes of being and operation. According to Hodge: the distinct modes of subsistence in the Trinity are reflected in the predication of "certain acts, or conditions" to "one person of the Trinity, which are never predicated of either of the others," such as "generation ... to the Father, filiation to the Son, and procession to the Spirit," while the distinct modes of operation are reflected in the way certain external operations, common to and indivisible among the persons of the Trinity, are nevertheless "predominantly" predicated of one

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1:443–45.

¹⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:444.

¹⁵ As the context demonstrates, Hodge uses the term "subordination" in the Latinate sense of "ordered under," referring to the relations of origin that distinguish the persons from each other, i.e., the fact that the Father personally exists and acts from himself, that the Son personally exists and acts from the Father, and that the Spirit personally exists and acts from the Father and the Son. (NB: "Subordination," for Hodge, does not describe an ordered relation of authority and submission between the persons of the Trinity, as some later theologians will come to use the term, but rather an order of subsistence within God's consubstantial being *ad intra* and indivisible operation *ad extra*.) Warfield, for reasons that will become clearer in section 3, seems to operate with a different sense of the term "subordination," assuming that it (and the relations of origin that the term traditionally signifies) connotes derivative, lesser status within the Godhead. As we will see below, Scripture and tradition give us ample reason to discount this assumption. See also footnote 52.

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person in particular. Thus, for example, “the Father creates, elects, and calls; the Son redeems; and the Spirit sanctifies.”¹⁶

Though not included in his summary of biblical teaching on the Trinity, Warfield does affirm with Hodge the existence of ordered relations among the persons in their external modes of operation:

There is, of course, no question that in “modes of operation,” as it is technically called—that is to say, in the functions ascribed to the several persons of the Trinity in the redemptive process, and, more broadly, in the entire dealing of God with the world—the principle of subordination is clearly expressed. The Father is first, the Son is second, and the Spirit is third, in the operations of God as revealed to us in general, and very especially in those operations by which redemption is accomplished. Whatever the Father does, he does through the Son (Rom. 2:16; 3:22; 5:1, 11, 17, 21; Eph. 1:5; 1 Thess. 5:9; Tit. 3:5) by the Spirit. The Son is sent by the Father and does his Father’s will (Jn. 6:38); the Spirit is sent by the Son and does not speak from himself, but only takes of Christ’s and shows it unto his people (Jn. 17:7 ff.); and we have our Lord’s own word for it that “one that is sent is not greater than he that sent him” (Jn. 13:16). In crisp decisiveness, our Lord even declares, indeed: “My Father is greater than I” (Jn. 14:28); and Paul tells us that Christ is God’s, even as we are Christ’s (1 Cor. 3:23), and that as Christ is “the head of every man,” so God is “the head of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:3).¹⁷

Warfield argues, nevertheless, that the order of operation among the persons “in the redemptive process” does not reflect a deeper reality within God’s triune life. In other words, Warfield denies that the Trinity’s external modes of operation follow the Trinity’s eternal modes of subsistence: that the Father’s sending of the Son in time follows from the Father’s begetting of the Son in eternity, that the Father and the Son’s sending of the Spirit in time follows from the Father and the Son’s breathing of the Spirit in eternity. He suggests instead that these ordered external operations follow only from “a convention, an agreement, between the persons of the Trinity—a ‘covenant’ as it is technically called—by virtue of which a distinct function in the work of redemption is voluntarily assumed by each,” from “the humiliation of the Son of God for his work’s sake,” and from “the two natures in the constitution of his person as incarnated.”¹⁸ God’s triune *will*—as expressed in the covenant of redemption and in the Son’s incarnate mission—

¹⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:445.

¹⁷ Warfield, “Trinity,” 3020–21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3021.

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rather than God's triune *nature* determines his triune mode of operation within the external economy of nature, grace, and glory.

From one vantage point, Warfield's sensibilities here are entirely sound. Christian theology must affirm that God's triune will determines much about the character of the triune economy. The alternative would be the perilous assumption that God necessarily creates, necessarily becomes incarnate, and necessarily indwells the church. Nevertheless, while Christian theology must affirm the *freedom* of creation, incarnation, and indwelling, it has typically affirmed also that God's external actions in creation, incarnation, and indwelling *correspond* in some way to realities that obtain within God's triune life, that God's ordered modes of operation outside himself (*ad extra*) follow God's ordered modes of subsistence inside himself (*ad intra*). And it has affirmed that these ordered modes of subsistence are identifiable by the personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration. This Warfield fails to affirm, and that for what he deems biblical reasons.

Contrary to broad Protestant and Catholic exegetical consensus, Warfield argues that the revealed names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" do not signify the personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration. His argument is twofold. First, Warfield attempts to relativize the significance of these revealed names by pointing to broader patterns of Trinitarian naming in the New Testament. It may seem "natural ... to assume that the mutual relations of the persons of the Trinity are revealed in the designations, 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,' " Warfield concedes, but the vast diversity of names used by New Testament writers to describe the divine persons and the varied orders in which the divine persons are described militate against this assumption.¹⁹ In the Synoptic Gospels, and especially in the Johannine writings, the names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" are common designations of the divine persons. In Paul and other New Testament authors, however, the names "God," "the Lord Jesus Christ," and "the Holy Spirit" are also common.²⁰ Moreover, he continues, the latter designations do not always follow the same order as that found, for example, in Matthew's baptismal formula where the Father is named first, the Son is named second, and the Holy Spirit is named third (Matthew 28:19). In the case of these other designations, sometimes the Lord Jesus Christ is named first (2 Cor 13:14), sometimes the Spirit is named first (1 Cor 12:4–6; Eph 4:4–6).²¹ Given the diverse pattern of Trinitarian naming in the New Testament, Warfield

¹⁹ Ibid., 3020.

²⁰ Ibid., 3019.

²¹ Ibid., 3020.

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contends, we should not conclude that the names “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” exclusively indicate the nature of the divine persons’ internal relations.

Second, Warfield argues that the traditional interpretation of the names “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” has misunderstood their theological significance. Though his argument at this point is formally quite similar to that of Herman Alexander Röell, Thomas Ridgely, and several leading New England Congregationalist theologians, Warfield does not follow Röell, Ridgely, and others in arguing that these names merely describe the divine persons in terms of their economic relationships with creatures.²² According to Warfield, the personal names signify “eternal and necessary relations.”²³ What is the nature of these “eternal and necessary relations”? Warfield grants that it may be natural to assume the names “Son” and “Spirit” imply *relations of origin* among the divine persons, i.e., relations in which the Father is the source of the Son through begetting and in which the Father and the Son are the source of the Spirit through breathing. “But,” he insists, “it is quite certain that this was not the denotation of either term.”²⁴ When one considers John 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 2:10–11—texts that provide nearly “formal definitions” of the terms “Son” and “Spirit” according to Warfield, the emphasis in both cases “is laid on the notion of equality or sameness.”²⁵ Furthermore, Warfield attempts to demonstrate that other terms, such as “only begotten” (John 1:18) and “firstborn” (Col 1:15), “contain no implication of derivation” but instead indicate “unique consubstantiality” and “priority of existence.”²⁶ Warfield’s interpretive conclusion: “What underlies the conception of sonship in Scriptural speech is just ‘likeness’; whatever the father is that the son is also.” The same goes for the Holy Spirit.²⁷

With these two arguments Warfield attempts to demonstrate that the ordered relations that characterize God’s tripersonal action outside himself do not characterize God’s tripersonal relations inside himself. Before addressing these two arguments, we should

²² We will return to Röell’s views below. For Ridgely’s arguments in this regard, see *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion are Explained and Defended, Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly’s Larger Catechism*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1814), 1:259–60, 263, 266–70, 274, 277. For Moses Stuart, see *Letters on the Eternal Generation of the Son of God, Addressed to the Rev. Samuel Miller* (Andover: Mark Newman, 1822). Warfield interacts with these views in his “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Calvin and Calvinism*, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), ch. 4. According to James H. Moorhead, “[Moses] Stuart claimed he had never once heard [the doctrine of eternal generation] ‘seriously avowed and defended’ in New England” [!] (Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 70).

²³ Warfield, “Trinity,” 3021.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3020.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

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note what seems to be Warfield's major worry about affirming ordered relations of paternity, filiation, and spiration within God's triune being. In his judgment, the personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration imply the existence of "derivation" and "subordination" within the triune God and thereby compromise "The complete and undiminished deity of each of these persons."²⁸ For Warfield, the full equality and consubstantiality of the divine persons is ultimately at stake in interpreting the revealed names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit."

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Relative to Hodge's summary of Trinitarian doctrine, we may describe Warfield's as one characterized by a "principled non-affirmation" of the doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. Though Warfield's *ISBE* article does not explicitly *deny* these doctrines,²⁹ it argues from multiple angles that biblical exegesis does not require us to *affirm* them. The discontinuity between Hodge and Warfield, however, should not be overstated. In his treatment of the doctrine of eternal generation, Hodge expresses a number of worries about attempts by Pro-Nicene theologians to explain the doctrine and ends up with an apophatic account that effectively drains the doctrine of much of its meaning.³⁰ Hodge's treatment of the doctrine of eternal generation, moreover, resonates with that of his Princeton colleague Samuel Miller who, in his defense of the doctrine against Moses Stuart's objections, expresses similar reservations regarding earlier explanations of the doctrine, including most notably that of Francis Turretin.³¹ Warfield's "principled non-affirmation" of the doctrine of eternal generation thus represents a not unnatural development within a Princeton theological tradition already characterized by what we might call a "tepid affirmation" of the doctrine.

3. WARFIELD'S REVISION IN ITS BROADER HISTORICAL CONTEXT

We may shed further light on the nature of Warfield's position by looking at the broader historical-theological context within which it emerges. Toward the conclusion of his *ISBE* article, Warfield offers a brief sketch of the history of Trinitarian doctrine. On his reading, the history of the doctrine exhibits a struggle between those who properly assert "the principle of equalization" among the persons of the Trinity and those who "unduly ... emphasize the elements of subordinationism which still hold a place ... in the traditional

²⁸ Ibid., 3020, 3022. This motivation is also observed by Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

²⁹ A point rightly emphasized by Fred G. Zaspel, "Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield on the Doctrine of the Trinity," *SBJT* 21.2 (2017): 104–7.

³⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 468–73.

³¹ Samuel Miller, *Letters on the Eternal Sonship of Christ: Addressed to the Rev. Professor Stuart of Andover* (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1823), 34–36.

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language in which the church states its doctrine.”³² Warfield identifies John Calvin among those who stand on the right side of this historical contest: “Calvin takes his place, alongside of Tertullian, Athanasius and Augustine, as one of the chief contributors to the exact and vital statement of the Christian doctrine of the triune God.”³³ According to Warfield, Calvin’s particular contribution to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is “to reassert and make good the attribute of the self-existence of the Son.”³⁴ Although Warfield’s *ISBE* article does not fully indicate *how* Calvin’s theology accomplishes this, his other writings do. Calvin’s radical commitment to the aseity of the Son leads to a revision of the doctrine of eternal generation in the Reformer’s own thought and lays the exegetical foundation that would eventually lead to wholesale rejection of the doctrine of eternal generation by later followers.³⁵ I believe Warfield’s rejection of the personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration is best understood as an attempt to perfect this trajectory in Calvinian Trinitarianism.

As Richard Muller observes, the affirmation and defense of the Son’s aseity is “the distinctive feature of Reformed trinitarianism.”³⁶ According to common Reformed teaching, the Son not only possesses the divine attributes of eternity, immutability, omnipotence, and omnipresence, he also possesses the divine attribute of aseity. The Son is *autotheos*, God in and of himself. For Reformed theology, the affirmation of the Son’s aseity is integral to the affirmation of the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father. Because he is “equal with God” (John 5:19), the Son must have “life in himself” just “as the Father has life in himself” (John 5:26).

The majority of theologians in the Reformed tradition argue that the aseity of the Son is consistent with the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. The consistency between these two aspects of the Son’s person lies in properly distinguishing the Son’s *being* (that which the Son holds in *common* with the Father and the Spirit) from his *mode of being* (that which *distinguishes* the Son from the Father and the Spirit). Because he is “equal with God” *in being* (John 5:19), the Son has “life in himself” just “as the Father has life in himself” (John 5:26). Because he is distinct from the Father *in his mode of being*, the Son has “life in himself” as something eternally “granted” or communicated to him by

³² Warfield, “Trinity,” 3022.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 276–77.

³⁶ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume Four: The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 324. For development and debate, see Ellis, *Calvin*. For debate at the Westminster Assembly, see Chad Van Dixhoorn, “Post-Reformation Trinitarian Perspectives,” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), ch. 10.

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the Father (John 5:26). For these theologians, it is precisely the Son's *distinct mode of being* as one eternally begotten of the Father that accounts for his *being consubstantial* with the Father.³⁷ Thus Francis Turretin:

As all generation indicates a communication of essence on the part of the begetter to begotten (by which the begotten becomes like the begetter and partakes of the same nature with him), so this wonderful generation is rightly expressed as a communication of essence from the Father (by which the Son possesses indivisibly the same essence with him and is made perfectly like him).³⁸

Though he does not reject the doctrine of eternal generation per se, Calvin's commitment to the Son's aseity does lead him to revise the doctrine considerably. For Calvin and the significant minority of Reformed theologians that follows him on this issue, the eternal generation of the Son from the Father involves no "communication of essence" to the Son by the Father.³⁹ Accordingly, texts like John 5:26, which speaks of the Father "granting" aseity to the Son, are not interpreted with reference to the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son but with reference to the temporal, economic relationship between the Father and the Son in his office as incarnate mediator. The Genevan Reformer considers a properly Trinitarian exegesis of this verse "harsh and far-fetched." In his judgment, the focus of John 5:26 is the Son of God only "so far as he is manifested in the flesh."⁴⁰

Calvin's precedent in revising the doctrine of eternal generation and his pattern of exegetical reasoning provide the foundation for "the more advanced position" on eternal

³⁷ Representative statements include Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Willard, repr. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, n.d.), 130–32, 135–36, 181–84; Jerome Zanchi, *De Tribus Elohim* (Frankfurt am Main, 1572), I, 5.7.4 (p. 222, col. 2); Dolf te Velde, ed., *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 8.7, 18; James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity: Or, the Sum and Substance of the Christian Religion*, ed. Michael Nevarr, repr. ed. (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 69–70; John Owen, *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: Or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man in The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 71–72.

³⁸ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 293.

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.13.19–29; with Scott R. Swain, "The Trinity in the Reformers," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 235; and more fully Ellis, *Calvin*.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 198–207. On Calvin's general reticence toward Trinitarian reflection in his exegesis of classical Trinitarian proof-texts, see Arie Baars, *Om Gods verhevenheid en Zijn nabijheid: De Drie-eenheid bij Calvijn* (Kampen: Kok, 2004), 291–308.

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generation that Warfield finds in Herman Alexander Röell (1653–1718).⁴¹ Röell, Professor at Franeker and then Utrecht in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was a leading synthesizer of Cartesian rationalism and Reformed theology.⁴² Building upon a notion of divine perfection derived from his Cartesian natural theology and eager to avoid the subordinationist tendencies he detected in Arminian and Socinian thought,⁴³ Röell elevated the Calvinian commitment to divine aseity to the level of critical principle for Trinitarian theology. The effect was to exclude any conception of communication or origination, whether in being or mode of being, from God's triune life.⁴⁴ Where the majority of Reformed theologians had confessed a self-existent Son *because* they confessed an only-begotten Son, and where Calvin had confessed a self-existent Son *alongside* the (modified) confession of an only-begotten Son, Röell forced theology to choose *between* a self-existent Son and an only-begotten Son.

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As noted earlier, Warfield does not follow Röell and others in limiting the meaning of the personal names of the Trinity to their significance within the economy of salvation. It seems, however, that Warfield ultimately accepts Röell's dilemma regarding aseity and eternal generation and that he is willing to sacrifice the confession of "begotten not made" on the altar of "consubstantial with the Father."

Before moving on to assess Warfield's proposed revision in Trinitarian theology, it is worth pausing to observe what the preceding discussion exposes. First, the relationship between divine aseity and divine persons is far from self-evident—even among those who share similar Reformed theological sensibilities! Second, the implications of divine aseity for the nature of divine persons is internally related to the question of whether the derivation (certainly an unhappy term) of one divine person from another divine person entails equality or inferiority. As we have seen, for the majority of Reformed theologians, derivation is the root of equality and thus a ground for confessing the full deity of Christ; for the Calvinian minority of Reformed theologians, which includes Warfield, derivation is evidence of inferiority and thus a threat to an orthodox Christological confession. Third and finally, theological judgments regarding each of the aforementioned issues rest upon exegetical judgments about the interpretation of various Trinitarian proof-texts and

⁴¹ Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 276–77. Compare Warfield's judgment with Miller's estimation of Röell vis-à-vis Turretin's views of eternal generation in, *Letters on the Eternal Sonship of Christ*, 34–36.

⁴² For fuller discussion of Röell's views, see Ellis, *Calvin*, 224–40.

⁴³ For the influence of Arminian and Socinian views of the Trinity upon Reformed formulations of the doctrine, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:328–32.

⁴⁴ Herman Alexander Röell, *De Generatione Filii et Morte Fidelium Temporalis* (Franeker: Gyselaar, 1689); and idem, *Explicatio Catecheseos Heidelbergensis: Opus Posthumum* (Utrecht, 1728), 175–84, 259–71; with Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 276; and Ellis, *Calvin*, 237–38.

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hermeneutical judgments about which proof-texts count as relevant to the discussion, which brings us back to the topic at hand.

4. RESPONSE TO WARFIELD'S REVISION

According to Warfield, the revealed names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" do not signify the personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration. What should we make of this interpretive claim?

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Warfield's first argument against the traditional interpretation is that the New Testament uses a wide variety of names in varied orders to describe the Trinity. This argument, however, is not problematic for the traditional interpretation of the personal names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit." The variety of names and varied orders of naming that appear in the New Testament neither relativize nor undermine the traditional interpretation. As we will see below, the New Testament often employs additional names for the Trinity in order to further specify the meaning of the names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit." Moreover, though Paul commonly identifies the triune persons from the perspective of the relations in which they stand to creatures (e.g., "God," "Lord Jesus Christ," etc.) rather than from the relations in which they stand to each other (e.g., "Father," "Son," etc.), this pattern is not absolute. The apostle also uses descriptions that combine the persons' relations to creatures with their relations to each other and, when he does, these combinations reinforce the significance of the personal names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit." Thus, for example, Paul regularly identifies the first person of the Trinity as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; see also 1 Pet 1:3). And he identifies the Spirit as "the Spirit of [God's] Son" (Gal 4:6) and as "the Spirit of sonship" (Rom 8:15), who enables us to call God, "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6). Finally, the fact that the persons appear in varied syntactical orders in the New Testament writings hardly supports Warfield's criticism of the traditional interpretation of the personal names of the Trinity. Syntactical order should not be confused with personal order. Though Jesus Christ appears syntactically before God and the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 13:14, the appropriation of "grace" to Jesus Christ, "love" to God, and "fellowship" to the Holy Spirit indicates that, in Paul's mind, God's triune saving agency proceeds from God's loving impulse, through the gracious gift of Jesus Christ, culminating in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This ordered mode of operation in God's triune saving agency does not contradict but confirms a traditional understanding of the ordered modes of being among the persons of the Trinity.

Warfield's second argument against the traditional interpretation of the personal names is that in Scripture the names "Son" and "Spirit" connote likeness, equality, and sameness with the Father rather than derivation from the Father. This argument also runs into

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problems upon closer analysis. In biblical idiom—whether it be Trinitarian or non-Trinitarian contexts, literal or metaphorical contexts, relations of origin are not opposed to likeness; relations of origin regularly constitute the basis for likeness. In Genesis 5:3, Adam “fathers” Seth “in his own likeness, after his image.” In this paradigmatic instance of literal fathering, natural *likeness* between Adam the father and Seth the son is traceable to the relation of origin whereby Adam *begets* Seth. Likewise, even in metaphorical cases of fathering, where there is metaphysical disproportion between father and offspring, the link between begetting and likeness is preserved and emphasized. In the Davidic Covenant, the right of the Davidic heir to rule on earth as YHWH rules in heaven follows from the fact that YHWH has “begotten” him as his son, thus constituting him the heir of God’s family business (2 Sam 7:12–14; Ps 2:6–9). In similar fashion, though there is infinite metaphysical disproportion between God and the created lights that he has produced and placed in the heavens, James 1:17 perceives in the created lights a filial resemblance to the “Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Again, in metaphorical contexts of begetting as in literal contexts, resemblance is rooted in relations of origin.⁴⁵

What is true in non-Trinitarian contexts of begetting, both literal and metaphorical, is true in Trinitarian contexts as well. Leaving aside the question of how we should translate μονογενής (various options include “one of a kind,” “only begotten,” and “only child”), consider three examples of how the New Testament portrays the Father-Son relation as a relation as a *relation of origin*, with the Father being the principle or source of the Son’s person or agency, and *ontological equality*, with the Son sharing the self-same nature and agency of the Father.⁴⁶

(1) *Illustrations of the Father-Son relation*: The New Testament employs a number of illustrations, what Athanasius calls “*paradeigmata*,”⁴⁷ that further amplify the nature of the relation that obtains between the Father and the Son. These additional names for the Son are not merely ornamental. They function as indispensable conceptual tools that help faith contemplate more fully the (ultimately incomprehensible) nature of the Father-Son

⁴⁵ For further discussion of this point, see Scott R. Swain, “The Radiance of the Father’s Glory: Eternal Generation, the Divine Names, and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 36–40.

⁴⁶ In the following two paragraphs, I draw from Scott R. Swain, “Divine Trinity,” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 88–90.

⁴⁷ On which, see Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 62–67; and idem, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 110–14.

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relation.⁴⁸ Drawing on Old Testament and other Jewish wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs 8; Wisdom 7:26), the New Testament portrays the Son as the “radiance” of the Father’s glory (Heb 1:3), as the “image” of the invisible God (Col 1:15), and as the “Word” of God (John 1:1; Rev 19:13). In each instance, these illustrations indicate complete ontological correspondence between the Father and the Son: the Word of God is God (John 1:1); the image of the invisible God stands on the Creator side of the Creator-creature divide as the one by whom, in whom, and for whom creation exists (Col 1:16–17); the radiance of God is the exact imprint of the Father’s substance (Heb 1:3). These illustrations also indicate that ontological correspondence between the Father and the Son obtains within the context of a relation of origin wherein the Father is the principle or source of the Son, who is his perfect Word, image, and radiance.

(2) *God’s unique name/nature and the Father-Son relation:* The New Testament also indicates that the Father and the Son share the unique divine name and nature within the context of a relation characterized by giving on the part of the Father and receiving on the part of the Son. According to John 17:11 and Philippians 2:9–11, the Father has given his “name” to the Son. According to John 5:26, the Father has granted the Son to have “life in himself” just as the Father has “life in himself.”

(3) *God’s external actions and the Father-Son relation:* Finally, the New Testament in various ways displays God’s external actions toward his creatures as expressing the ordered relation of the Father and the Son. In God’s creative and providential activity, the Father acts *through* the Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16), and the Son acts *from* the Father (John 5:19). In similar fashion, the Son’s mission to become incarnate and make atonement is a mission he fulfills in obedience to the Father who sent him (Mark 12:1–12; John 6:38; Gal 4:4–5), and the Son’s enthronement as king is an authority he receives from his Father (Matt 11:27; 28:18; Eph 1:20–23; Heb 1:3–4; with Ps 110). In each of these instances, we are not dealing with a distinction between God’s action and the action of a creature. We are dealing with God’s unique divine action as creator, providential ruler, redeemer, and lord, and with a distinction that obtains *within* this unique divine action: a distinction that expresses the ordered relation of the Father and the Son.

Similar patterns of divine naming characterize the Spirit’s relation to the Father and the Son as well. (1) *Illustrations of the Spirit’s relation to the Father and the Son:* The New Testament employs several paradigms or illustrations that amplify the unique nature of the Spirit’s relationship to the Father and the Son. As in the case of the Father-Son relation,

⁴⁸ Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, 1.19–20 in *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius and Didymus*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 82–85.

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a number of these illustrations are drawn from the Old Testament (e.g., Isa 44:3; Joel 2:28; Ezek 47:1–12). Particularly instructive are illustrations that associate the Holy Spirit with water. The Spirit is identified as one who is “poured out” by the Father (Rom 5:5) and by the Son (Acts 2:33), as the element with which Jesus baptizes his disciples (Mark 1:8; 1 Cor 12:13), and as the living water that flows from the throne of God and of the lamb (Rev 22:1). This rich web of imagery at once identifies the Spirit as divine source of life and as one who in his life-giving identity and mission proceeds from the Father and the Son.

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(2) *God’s unique name/nature and the Spirit’s relation to the Father and the Son:* The New Testament also indicates the nature of the Spirit’s relation to the Father and the Son by virtue of the Spirit’s relation to God’s unique name and nature. As the Father gives the divine name to the Son, so the Spirit (who also shares the divine name: 2 Cor 3:17) causes the Son to be acknowledged as “Lord” (1 Cor 12:3), to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11). Similarly, while the Spirit is “the truth” (1 John 5:6), he is also the Spirit “of truth” (1 John 4:6). Consequently, he is able to guide Jesus’s disciplines “into all the truth” (John 16:13) because of the unique relation in which he stands to the Father and the Son: He does not speak “from himself” but only what “he hears” (John 16:13), taking what he holds in common with the Son and with the Father and declaring it to the apostles (John 16:14–15).⁴⁹ When it comes to divine truth, therefore, the distinction between the Spirit and the Father and the Son “is not in what is had, but in the order of having.”⁵⁰

(3) *God’s external actions and the Spirit’s relation to the Father and the Son:* Finally, as in the case of the Father and the Son, the Spirit’s ordered relation to the Father and the Son is expressed in God’s external actions toward his creatures. The Father and the Son work *through* the Spirit: the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:13) and Jesus performs miracles “by the Spirit of God” (Matt 12:28). Moreover, as the Father sends the Son to accomplish his incarnate mission, in similar fashion the Father and the Son send the Spirit to indwell God’s children (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Gal 4:6) in order that, through the Son, Jew and Gentile might have access “in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18; with 1:23 and 5:18). Once again, an observable pattern emerges: The distinction between the activity of the Spirit toward creatures and the activity of the Father and the Son toward creatures is not a distinction between creaturely action and a divine action. The distinction between the three is a distinction that is internal to the singular divine action whereby triune God fulfills his ancient covenant promise to dwell among his people forever (John 14:16–17, 23; with Lev 26:12), and that manifests the Spirit’s ordered

⁴⁹ Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit*, 170–74, in *Works on the Spirit*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011).

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 13–21*, trans. Fabian Larcher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 145.

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relation to the Father and the Son. In the coming of the triune God to dwell among us, the Spirit comes from the Father through the Son and leads us through the Son to the Father.

One might object that many of the aforementioned examples of Trinitarian naming refer to the persons within the economy of salvation, not to their eternal relations. However, while many of these examples speak of the persons *in* the economy, it is important to observe that they do not merely speak *of* the economy. The focus in each of the above instances is the *relation* that obtains *between* the persons, whether prior to or within the economy of redemption. Moreover, the fact that the New Testament portrays the missions of the Son and the Spirit as means of unveiling God's true name and nature (Matt 11:25–27; John 17:3, 6) suggests that we should not draw too sharp a division between God's eternal modes of being and his temporal modes of operation. The distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity does not map onto the Kantian distinction between noumenal and phenomenal realms. Better, I think, to see the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit as the free, gracious, temporal extensions of their eternal, necessary, natural relations of origin.⁵¹

What about Warfield's worry that the traditional interpretation of the personal names compromises the full equality of the divine persons? The preceding discussion suggests that Warfield's worry is unjustified. According to the pattern of personal naming traced above, the eternal relations of origin that constitute the Son and the Spirit as divine persons do not constitute them as derivative deities. The eternal relations of origin that constitute the Son and the Spirit as divine persons are the bases of their full ontological equality with the Father: the Son *of* God *is* God; the Spirit *of* God *is* God.⁵² Moreover, this

⁵¹ On the relationship between eternal relations of origin and temporal missions, see Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), ch. 15; Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), chs. 3–6. On the metaphysical distinctions involved in this relationship, see Scott R. Swain, *The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), chs. 6–9.

⁵² From a linguistic perspective, relations of origin (i.e., eternal generation, eternal procession) gloss the personal names (i.e., Son of God, Spirit of God). From a metaphysical perspective, relations of origin distinguish the persons without dividing the essence—indeed, they are the *only* way of distinguishing the persons without dividing the essence. Grasping this point helps us appreciate where uses of terms such as “subordination” are appropriate or inappropriate in Trinitarian theology. When the term “subordination” is used, as it traditionally has been used, to refer to relations of origin (or to their temporal expressions in mission), then the term is licit. When the term “subordination” is used, as it more recently has been used, as an alternative to relations of origin in order to distinguish the persons by relations of authority and submission, then the term is illicit. Whereas the former usage preserves what is common to the three (being, authority, glory, operation, etc.), the latter compromises what is common to the three, turning, for example, “authority” into a personal property of the Father rather than a common

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pattern of personal naming suggests that, far from undermining God's aseity, the doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit actually deepen our understanding of God's perfection. Aseity is not merely a negative attribute, referring to God's lack of dependence upon creatures. Aseity is a positive attribute, referring to the internal, tripersonal fecundity of God's life as Father, Son, and Spirit. God is eternally, internally full. And God's eternal, internal fullness is manifest in the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit.⁵³ As Warfield's European counterpart, Herman Bavinck, eloquently affirms, God's intra-Trinitarian fecundity "is a beautiful theme," which illumines both God's internal perfection as Father, Son, and Spirit and also God's external works:

God is no abstract, fixed, monadic, solitary substance, but a plenitude of life. It is his nature (οὐσία) to be generative (γεννητική) and fruitful (καρπογόνος). It is capable of expansion, unfolding, communication. Those who deny this fecund productivity fail to take seriously the fact that God is an infinite fullness of blessed life. All such people have left is an abstract deistic concept of God, or to compensate for his sterility, in pantheistic fashion they include the life of the world in the divine being. Apart from the Trinity even the act of creation becomes inconceivable. For if God cannot communicate himself, he is a darkened light, a dry spring, unable to exert himself outward to communicate himself to creatures.⁵⁴

5. CONCLUSION

I conclude with several observations regarding the importance of the traditional rendering of the revealed names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" by the personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration. First, the traditional interpretation suggests a *reason* for the Bible's employment of *these names in particular* in the revelation of the triune God. The traditional interpretation claims that the Bible *calls* God "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" because relations of paternity, filiation, and spiration *exist* preeminently in God, in a sublime manner that ultimately transcends our understanding and evokes wonder. However, Warfield's interpretation, which reduces the meaning of "Son" to "likeness," cannot tell us why the Bible calls the second person of the Trinity God's "Son" rather than

property of the three. In theological grammar, it is not the "lexicon" alone (i.e., terminology) that determines whether a theological viewpoint is licit, but also the "syntax" (i.e., ruled usage of terminology). See footnote 15.

⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I Q 27, art. 5, ad 3; I Q 32, art. 2, ad 3. For discussion of this theme in certain Pro-Nicene Fathers, see Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 114–15, 190. It is worth noting here that linking personal generation with ontological subordination was a typically "Arian" theological move.

⁵⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2: God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 308–9.

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God's "Brother." It is unclear, on Warfield's interpretation, what the personal names "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" actually *reveal* about the nature of God other than bare triunity.

Second, the traditional interpretation of the personal names of the Trinity is hermeneutically productive. Among other things, Wesley Hill's recent book, *Paul and the Trinity*, demonstrates how classical categories of "persons in (asymmetrical) relations" help us move beyond the constraints of the modern interpretive categories of "high" and "low" Christologies, providing a richer, more nuanced reading of Pauline texts.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Andreas Köstenberger and I have attempted to demonstrate the profitability of these categories for interpreting the Gospel of John.⁵⁶

Third, the traditional interpretation offers a way of relating and distinguishing God's eternal modes of being and his temporal modes of operation. It is one of the stranger ironies of modern Reformed and evangelical theology that many who follow Warfield in rejecting the eternal generation of the Son have seized upon eternal subordination—a notion fiercely opposed by Warfield—as the distinctive personal property of the Son.⁵⁷ The traditional interpretation of the personal names of the Trinity allows us to honor Warfield's insight that the obedience of the incarnate Son is a contingent consequence of the intra-Trinitarian covenant of redemption, not a necessary feature of his personal identity, all the while showing us how the Son's economic obedience expresses his eternal generation from the Father.⁵⁸

Fourth, the traditional interpretation of the personal names of the Trinity helps us better appreciate the soteriological and religious significance of Trinitarian theology. One of the great strengths of Warfield's *ISBE* article is its focus upon the soteriological and religious setting of New Testament teaching on the Trinity. Warfield states:

If he [the Christian] could not construct the doctrine of the Trinity out of his consciousness of salvation, yet the elements of his consciousness of salvation are interpreted to him and

⁵⁵ Wesley Hill, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

⁵⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), esp. chs. 7–8, and 10.

⁵⁷ See, most recently, many of the essays in Bruce A. Ware and John Starke, ed. *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). See also footnote 52.

⁵⁸ For further development of this theme, see Scott R. Swain and Michael Allen, "The Obedience of the Eternal Son," *IJST* 15 (2013): 114–34; Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), ch. 6.

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reduced to order only by the doctrine of the Trinity which he finds underlying and giving their significance and consistency to the teaching of the Scriptures as to the process of salvation. By means of this doctrine he is able to think clearly and consequently of his threefold relation to the saving God, experienced by him as Fatherly love sending a Redeemer, as redeeming love executing redemption, as saving love applying redemption: all manifestations in distinct methods and by distinct agencies of the one seeking and saving love of God.⁵⁹

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The personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration further enrich and expand our understanding and experience of this “one seeking and saving love of God.” How so? They help us see that the eternal covenant of redemption—the foundation of all God’s saving works in time—flows from and expresses the deep, mutual, and eternal delight of the blessed Trinity. They help us see that the Father who has eternally begotten an eternally beloved Son also wills to bring many other sons to glory. They help us see that, at the Father’s sovereign behest, the Father’s only-begotten Son has willed to become our kinsman redeemer, assuming our creaturely nature, satisfying our twofold debt to God’s law, in order that he might become the firstborn among many redeemed brothers and sisters. They help us see that the Holy Spirit who eternally proceeds in the mutual love of the Father and the Son has equipped the Son with all things necessary for redeeming his brothers and sisters; and, that redemption being accomplished, the Spirit now applies the blessings of adoption to us, uniting us to our incarnate elder brother and welcoming us into the fellowship which the Spirit has enjoyed with the Father and the Son from eternity and which we, in, with, and by the blessed Trinity, will enjoy for eternity as well, to the eternal praise of our great God and Savior: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰⁺⁶¹

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⁵⁹ Warfield, “Trinity,” 3021.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Michael Allen, Robert Cara, Graham Shearer, Fred Sanders, and Dolf te Velde for comments offered on an earlier draft of this article.

⁶¹ Swain, S. R. (2018). “B. B. Warfield and the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity.” *Themelios*, 43(1), 10–24.