ROBERT W. JENSON'S CONCEPT OF TRINITARIAN PERSONHOOD

by

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to examine and evaluate the completeness of the concept of 'person' used in Robert Jenson's trinitarian theology. After a brief introduction to the literature in chapter one, chapter two will present the various definitions of 'person' which have been of importance in talking about. Since Jenson is self-consciously a Barthian theologian, Barth's treatment of God's personhood will also be analysed. The link between Barth and Jenson will become apparent in chapter three where Jenson's theory of God as a 'person' will be presented. The delineation of Jenson's trinitarian thought in this chapter will cover his writings between 1975, when his first major article on the Trinity was published, and 1989. It is in these years that Jenson has been most prolific in writing about the Trinity.

Chapter four will deal with criticisms of Jenson's trinitarian doctrine. The natural theology involved in his concept of God's temporality severely undermines his own principles. The influence of idealism on Jenson's concept of 'Spirit' distorts his biblical exegesis. Also problematic is Jenson's method for using historical data to support his own conclusions. It is concluded that Jenson has not succeeded in providing an adequate definition of person for theology because he does not take account of personalist understandings of 'person', and ultimately ends up as a modalist. Chapter five will summarise and provide a conclusion to the findings of the thesis, and offer some suggestions for future theological reflection, in light of the strengths and weaknesses uncovered in the preceding critical analysis.

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I would like to acknowledge the special support provided by the Head Librarian Lorraine McQueen, Theological Librarian Glenn Wooden, and the inter-library loans department at Acadia University. Their patience and willingness to assist me and to obtain the majority of the materials needed for this thesis was not easy. Without their extra help this would be a much lesser project.

This thesis was prepared over twelve months, the last of which saw many late nights. My wife, Heather, deserves a medal for her endurance of not only that last month, but also of the whole year, which found me often distracted by books and articles.

Finally, my thanks is expressed especially to the fellowship of Grace Memorial Baptist Church, Fredericton, NB, for the faithful discipleship which nurtured my spiritual beginnings. This thesis is dedicated to them.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> [T]he doctrine of the Trinity has a wholly actual and not just a historical significance for us and for the dogmatics of our age, even though this is a very different age from that of Arius and Athanasius. In other words, it means that the criticism and correction of Church proclamation must be done to-day, as it was then, in the form of developing the doctrine of the Trinity.
>
> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1

The doctrine of the Trinity has received a remarkable amount of attention in the second half of the twentieth century.[1] With Karl Barth's call to a renewed effort to articulate the doctrine, the response has been intense—exploring the Trinity both as a metaphysical mystery and as a clue to the mystery of salvation by the one God of the Bible. The doctrine's decline as useless metaphysical baggage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—a result of the Enlightenment critique of metaphysics and specifically, the Christian understanding of the knowledge of God—has been overcome by a renewed understanding of the meaning of 'the biblical revelation of God'. This is not

[1]A good survey of primarily British and Continental trinitarian theology is J. Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Two useful North American surveys include T. Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), and M. Erickson, *God In Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

merely a revival of the trinitarian dogmas of the Nicene and Post-Nicene creeds, though the place of historical studies has played an important role in the analysis of the doctrine of the Trinity for the church today. Many new ideas are being put forward from a variety of perspectives, such as process theology, liberation theology, and more orthodox traditions.[2]

One of the key topics addressed, and the underlying motivation for this study, has been the concept of person as it relates to the classic orthodox formula "one nature in three persons."[3] The original development of the Greek term *hypostasis* (person) was somewhat ambiguous in relation to its distinction from the similar term *ousia* (substance), thus allowing room for the term to move among the various factions which were debating the essential understanding of the Trinity. As Augustine took up its usage he was confused by this ambiguity. When translating the terms into Latin there were two choices for translating word *hypostasis*: *substantia* or *persona*. They had differing results, and in

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[2]Some key texts from these traditions and schools include: liberationist theologies: L. Boff, *The Trinity and Society* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988); J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. M. Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); process theologies: J. Bracken, *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Selinsgrove, Pa: Susquehanna Press, 1991); S. Ogden, *The Reality of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1966); Roman Catholic theologies: W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984); K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel. (Kent, UK.: Burns & Oates; Herder & Herder, 1970); Orthodox theologies: J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Contemporary Theologians, no. 4 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993); A. Nissiotis, "The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity for Church Life and Theology," in *The Orthodox Ethos*, ed. A. J. Philippu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Protestant orthodoxy: W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

[3]The history of the creedal formulas, including later phrases such as *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, is well described in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3d ed. (London: Longman, 1972).

the end *persona* was seen to be the better choice by Augustine, since it followed in the tradition of Tertullian, who coined its usage for Latin trinitarian theology in the second century.[4] Even though he accepted the authority of the creeds, he expressed misgiving about the instability of the concept: "The Greeks also have another word, *hypostasis*, but they make a distinction that is rather obscure to me between *ousia* and *hypostasis* . . . . So we say three persons, not in order to say that precisely, but in order not to be reduced to silence."[5]

The twentieth century has seen similar reactions to the concept of 'person', not so much because of the problems of translation or ambiguity with the concept of *ousia*, but because of the competing definitions which have arisen over the centuries. Not only does the classic Cappadocian idea of 'one nature in three persons' have a role in understanding 'person' in trinitarian theology, but so do the classic Roman Catholic definition of Boethius, and the modern ideas that have arisen out of the Enlightenment. Various theologians have opted for one or more groups of concepts to define 'person' in this century, some deciding to reject the word completely. In the latter instance Barth and Karl

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[4]If he had chosen *substantia*, then the confusion with the Greek term *ousia* would have been made more acute.

[5]Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. E. Hill, part 1, vol. 5, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. J. E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), V.10. Subsequent references to this volume, throughout the thesis, will be as *De Trinitate*.

Rahner are the main inspiration for attempts to provide new terminology.[6] This lack of consensus on the meaning and place of 'person' in the Trinity has generated much debate.

Robert W. Jenson has been an important voice in trinitarian discussions for several years. He is an American theologian and minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Trained in the 1950's in theology and philosophy, including doctoral work at Heidelberg under Peter Brunner, Jenson has been at the forefront of new explorations into the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian theology. To date, Jenson's most important contribution has been to argue that the basis for trinitarian thought is in a biblical understanding of time and eternity, centred around the resurrection of Christ.[7] This christocentric approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is strongly influenced by narrative theology and postliberal method.[8]

The influence of Jenson's work has not been limited to North America, but extends through Britain and Europe (especially Germany). Consequently, he is an important representative of English language theology. His thinking on the Trinity is in many ways an extension of Barth's original project. The importance of Barth in theology is still

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[6]K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2d ed., eds. T. F. Torrance and G. Bromiley, Vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 1, trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 353-68. K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 106-09.

[7]A summary of Jenson's work in this area of philosophical theology is J. R. Albright, "The Story of the Triune God: Time and Eternity in Robert Jenson's Theology," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26, no. 1 (1996), 36-54.

[8]The multiple forms of narrative theology, as well as Jenson's place among them is explained in: *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, s.v. "narrative theology," by L. G. Jones. See also: S. A. Dunham, "From Modernism to Postmodernism: Biblical

strong, and thus Jenson's influential work provides an important bridge from that earlier theology to the contemporary scene, especially for mainline denominations which struggle under many theological battles that have weakened orthodoxy in those churches.

Jenson's main contribution to trinitarian doctrine has been *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel.*[9] The book was among the first major, positive, and innovative treatments of the Trinity which have multiplied in the last seventeen years. This book also provided most of the basic material and structure for the section on the doctrine of God in the two-volume *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl Braaten and Jenson. In this work Jenson also contributed the section on the Holy Spirit, which contains an important discussion of the personhood of the Spirit.[10]

Since Robert Jenson is still in the midst of his theological career, a study of his thought is always in danger of being premature in its judgements. While the main body of this thesis will deal with his work in the 1980s, when Jenson was writing specifically on the Trinity, this is not because his most recent work is unimportant. Rather, there are two reasons: First, the earlier work forms a body which is generally regarded as comprehensive of Jenson's intentions and substance. Most scholar's discussion of Jenson's work are from *The Triune Identity* and his chapters in *Christian Dogmatics*. Second, his most recent

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Authority in the theology of Robert W. Jenson," in *Full of the Holy Spirit and Faith: Essays in Honour of A. A. Trites*, ed. S. A. Dunham (Wolfville, N.S.: Gaspereau Press, 1997), 89-106.

[9](Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

[10](Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). In several essays Jenson has also discussed his understanding of God's personhood and *hypostases*, including "Three Identities of One Action," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): 1-15.

work does indicate some serious reconsideration of his position on personhood and God. However, since the indications are not elaborated specifically it is difficult to predict the extent to which Jenson's thought has changed. This thesis was also written before the availability of Jenson's magnum opus, *Systematic Theology* was available.[11] Chapter Five will take later articles into account as much as possible.

Another factor in dealing with a living theologian is that there is not always sufficient critical material of a high calibre available. Most discussion of Jenson's theology has centred around his concept of eternity and his eschatological ontology. In this regard the work of D. Larson, *Times of the Trinity: A Proposal for Theistic Cosmology*,[12] and R. J. Russell, "Is the Triune God the Basis for Physical Time?"[13] are important major studies. Fortunately, Jenson's concern for the eternity of God is bound up with his consideration of personhood, which allows for the appropriation of such critiques of his work. Other authors have taken up his concern about personhood more directly, including important critiques in Colin Gunton's *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*,[14] Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*, and T. Peter's *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life*. W. J. Hill's *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of*

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[11]To be published by Oxford University Press in late June 1997. In private correspondence with Jenson, he indicated that the *Systematic Theology* would present the details of his rethinking on the topics of personhood and eternity.

[12]Worcester Polytechnic Institute Studies in Science, Technology, and Culture, eds. L. Schachterle and F. C. Lutz, vol. 17 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

[13]*CTNS Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (1991): 7-19.

[14](Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

Salvation,[15] while flawed in some of its analyses, does provide a good presentation on the seeds of Jenson's thought as they have come from Barth. He focuses on Jenson's earlier work in *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth*.[16]

Biographical material and critical analysis of Jenson's work is also found in J. R. Albright, "The Story of the Triune God: Time and Eternity in Robert Jenson's Theology," and D. S. Yeago, "Catholicity, Nihilism, and the God of the Gospel: Reflections on the Theology of Robert W. Jenson."[17] There have been a few dissertations recently, most helpful of which has been F. Schott's "God Is Love: The Contemporary Theological Movement of Interpreting the Trinity as God's Relational Being."[18] While the critical responses are not abundant, those several cited above do demonstrate excellent scholarship, and are authored by some of the leading theological minds of today.

This thesis will examine Jenson's concept of God as a 'person', and how he conceives the three *hypostases* as identities. The question of personhood has not been a minor one in trinitarian discussions. Therefore, chapter two will briefly present the various definitions of 'person' which have been of importance in talking about God, dealing

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[15](Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1982).

[16](Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

[17]*Dialog* 31, no. 1 (1992): 18-22.

[18](Th.D. Diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1990). Also useful, in a more limited context, are J. E. B. Fullenwieder, "Against an Ontological Interpretation of the Name of God: An Examination of Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Proposals" (M.S.T. Thesis, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, 1994); and C. S. Anderson, "Jenson's Trinitarian Metaphysics" (M.A. Thesis, Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity, 1993).

primarily with modern, but also with premodern definitions. Since Jenson is self-consciously a Barthian theologian, Barth's treatment of God's personhood will also be analysed.

The link between Barth and Jenson will become apparent in chapter three where Jenson's theory of how personhood applies to God will be presented in full. The delineation of Jenson's trinitarian thought in this chapter will, to a great extent, cover his writings from 1975, when his first major article on the Trinity was published, to 1989. It is in these years that Jenson has been most prolific about the doctrine of the Trinity.

Chapter four will deal with criticisms of Jenson's trinitarian doctrine, focusing on the consequences of holding the one God to be the only subject in the Trinity, a theory which runs counter to the majority of theories over the last twenty years. Also, a specific test of Jenson's theory will be applied to his description of the Holy Spirit, and whether it is able to reflect the general presentation of the Spirit in the Bible.

Chapter five will summarise the findings of the thesis and suggest some opportunities for further research about the concept of God's trinitarian personhood in light of the strengths and weaknesses uncovered in the preceding critical analysis.

Jenson's theology, specifically his doctrine of God, deals with a topic of perennial importance for the Christian faith. He is an original thinker who is not afraid to step forward in a discipline where original work is often seen as speculative and heretical. He is also one of the few North American theologians to have become a prominent voice in international and ecumenical discussions of the Trinity. The opportunity for Baptists to

enter into the new dialogues on the Trinity requires a sensitivity to the diversity of theological and denominational opinion, a careful understanding of the arguments, and a judicious use of the new ideas to further our understanding of God. It is hoped that this thesis will both help to elucidate Jenson's thoughts, and provide a helpful critique of trinitarian theology from an evangelical position.

CHAPTER TWO

'PERSON' IN TWENTIETH CENTURY TRINITARIAN THOUGHT

One of the major dilemmas which confronted the early church's trinitarian debates was the notion of personhood. The question of how the three persons were of the one essence was marked by the revolutionary definition of personhood something that had hitherto been unconsidered, at least explicitly.[1] The problem of defining 'person' in relation to the distinct *hypostases* of the Father, Son, and Spirit—while given a basic shape at Nicea and through subsequent Cappadocian input—has never been solved to the satisfaction of the whole Church. The modern period[2] saw major changes in the idea of person, which has made it even more conceptually slippery for theologians engaged in

[1]M. T. Clark points out that it would be "erroneous . . . to claim that antiquity had no notion of personhood, a notion which came to light, it is said, with Christianity and was delivered to the modern world by medieval thinkers, of whom Boethius was the first representative" ("Augustine on Person: Divine and Human," in *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, Collectanea Augustiniania [New York: Peter Lang, 1993], 99). She could be referring to the account of J. Ratzinger, "The concept of person, as well as the idea that stands behind this concept, is a product of Christian theology" ("Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 17 [1990]: 439). Otherwise, Ratzinger's brief account of the early development of the concept of person in Christian theology is a helpful summary of a complex matter.

[2]modern period in this thesis refers to the Enlightenment and subsequent centuries up to and including the nineteenth century.

trinitarian analysis.[3] One author has noted at least nine general definitions which are in use today, including two theological uses (trinitarian and christological).[4] Generally speaking, there are two different approaches for understanding 'divine person(s)' in twentieth century theology. One way is to see only one person in the Godhead, with the three *hypostases* as modes not being persons, but rather constitutive parts of the one person. The other path sees the traditional formula of three persons in one God to be correct in the fullest sense of the term 'person', even according to the modern usage of 'person'—which focuses on the individual's inner make-up, such as self-consciousness (and will be discussed later in this chapter). Obviously, the choice of which approach should be given priority significantly affects one's trinitarian conception of God. To understand these two strategies for defending divine personhood, a brief presentation of the two major formulas for person will be considered. Barth's role in directing reflection away from three persons to the one person—which is the Godhead—in order to keep the modern idea 'person' (without descending into tritheism), will also be presented as it has been influential in shaping Jenson's own theological concept of 'person'.[5]

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[3]Tracing the concept of person in the modern and contemporary eras is difficult. Few comprehensive and detailed studies are available. The *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Persons," by A. C. Danto, while now out of date, does have useful bibliographical sources up to the 1960s. The Classical and Medieval Latin term for person, *persona* is defined in R. A. Muller's *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

[4]L. B. Porter, "On Keeping 'Persons' in the Trinity: A Linguistic Approach to Trinitarian Thought," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 531 f.

[5]This influence began when Jenson wrote his doctoral dissertation on Barth, who was also one of his readers.

Classical Definition of *Hypostasis* as Person

Before proceeding with the modern debate, the classic understanding of *hypostasis* will be stated so that a broad picture of the development of this doctrine will be clear. *Hypostasis* was first used in connection with the Trinity by Origen, to denote the individual subsistence of the three eternal persons. He borrowed the term from Stoic sources, where it was used as a synonym for *ousia*, and refined it not only to identify the eternal *ousia* which the three are by essence, but also to specify their distinction.[6] By the time of Nicea it was the choice of *homoiousion* or *homoousion* which was the focus of debate. The relation of *hypostasis* to the *homoousion* was left unclarified. *Hypostasis* essentially was carried through by the weight of tradition which enabled it to refer to the *ousia* but also to stand for an individual, in some sense.[7]

The Cappadocian fathers refined the definition of *hypostasis*. No longer could *ousia* and *hypostasis* be used as synonyms. They argued that the *ousia* was the one essence which provided a "unity in operation [which] makes manifest an underlying unity in concrete being", the *hypostases* "mean 'objective presentations' of the Godhead or its

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[6]J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977), 129 ff.

[7]B. de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, vol. 1, *Studies in Historical Theology*, trans. E. J. Fortman (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications), 64-100. In this long description of the development of trinitarian language up to Nicea, de Margerie shows how the ambiguity of definitions, especially of *hypostasis*, allowed for doctrinal agreement to occur. See also J. N. D. Kelly, 223-58.

simultaneous 'modes of being.'"[8] These *hypostases* are defined according to their origins of relation—the relations beginning from the Father who is unbegotten, the Son begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeding from the Father through the Son.[9] The origins of relation are what distinguish each from the other, but also reveal their inseparable being (e.g. the Father cannot be the Father without the Son, by definition). This inseparability was defined as *perichoresis*, which could be described as inherence of the three *hypostases* in each other.[10] It should be noted that by describing a *hypostasis* as a mode of being (*tropos hyparxos*), the Cappadocians were specifically drawing out the idea of subsistence *and* the relational factors inherent in the proper names of each person in order to explain their unique particularity. The question of whether or not the three were persons in the modern personalist sense (to be dealt with later in this chapter) was not broached. It seems likely, however, that the implicit assumption was that the three were personal agents.[11]

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[8]W. J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1982), 48.

[9]For example, see Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, trans. P. Schaff and H. Wace (New York: Christian Literature, 1893), 301-309.

[10]A helpful summary of the Cappadocian understanding of *hypostasis* is presented in W. J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 47-50. For a representative sample of this see, Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V., trans. P. Schaff and H. Wace (New York: Christian Literature, 1893), 33-315. These writings against Eunomius are the most frequently cited texts for understanding the Cappadocian view of the Trinity, because they provide a thorough development of the problems and solutions which the three Cappadocians all worked with over their careers.

[11]Ibid.

Later Medieval thinkers wrestled with the concept of person and eventually came to accept the work of Boethius as standard (partly due to Thomas' acceptance of it). The definition of 'person' according to Boethius was an "individual substance of a rational nature."[12] Boethius' terminology can be understood thus: 'individual' is an "irreplaceable and inalienable uniqueness"[13] and the 'substance' is an independently existing (ontological) unit. This was originally an anthropological definition, but was also applied to God through the deduction of perfections which must apply to God. For example, God is obviously a spiritual substance rather than a material substance. He is also self-existing, whereas all other substances are dependent upon God. The distinction that marked Boethius' own contribution to understanding 'person' was how he had changed the focus of the Cappadocian thinking from subsistent relations (or relations of origin) to the place of rationality as the basis for distinguishing individual human substances. The foundation on which Boethius had constructed this idea was Aristotle's distinction of substance and accidents. Boethius could not accept the idea that relations, which were not part of the substance but rather accidents, should be the defining characteristic of a person. This was a step away from the attitude of the Nicene tradition which Augustine had hesitated to

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[12]*Persona est rationabilis naturae individua substantia*. See H. Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 119 n.1. and 190-202 and ff.

[13]W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 153-54.

take, although he had considered it. Apparently Boethius was swayed by Augustine's initial hesitations and his own deeper commitment to Aristotelian metaphysics.[14]

A Modern Definition of 'Person'

The definition of 'person' according to the standard usage initiated by Enlightenment thought has focused less upon the ideas put forward in Classical thinking, such as the Cappadocian understanding of subsistent relation, or later scholastic definitions, such as the 'rationalism' posed by Boethius. Instead, following a Cartesian

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[14]The place of Augustine in trinitarian thought is debated today. Most systematicians are willing to attribute to Augustine the blame for subsequent Western neglect of the Trinity. However, Augustinian scholars are beginning to challenge such assumptions. The relevant passage in *De Trinitate* concerning the notion of relations in the Trinity is VII, iii, 11. Helpful in judging Augustine's use of Aristotle is the essay by E. G. T. Booth, "St. Augustine's *de Trinitate* and Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist Noetic," in *Studia Patrisitca*, vol. 16, part II (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985), 487-490. This thesis presents a sympathetic treatment of the philosophical language used by Augustine. Whether Augustine rejected or accepted the concept of relation in the manner of the Cappadocians is difficult to decide, since Augustine ultimately withholds judgement. He seemed cautious about either endorsing or rejecting the place of relations for defining *hypostasis* in Trinity. Boethius, then, might take a hint from Augustine, but obviously arrives at his own conclusions. It is the position of this thesis that the problems of Western trinitarianism are better traced to Anselm, Boethius, and Thomas Aquinas, rather than Augustine. In support of this see F. Bourassa, "Théologie Trinitaire Chez Saint Augustin," *Gregorianum* 58, no. 4 (1977): 675-718; and J. Cavadini, "The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 103-123.

Also helpful for understanding both sides of the general debate are T. R. Martland, "A Study of Cappadocian and Augustinian Trinitarian Methodology," *Anglican Theological Review* 47 (1965): 252-263; E. Hill, "Karl Rahner's 'Remark's on the Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate* and St. Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 67-80; and R. D. Crouse, "St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*: Philosophical Method," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 16, pt. 2, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985), 501-510.

model of introspection by the self, abstracted from the world,[15] Locke's conception is typical: a person is a self-conscious and being, capable of self-understanding, and causation.[16] Ted Peters offers this extended explanation as indicative of the modern conception of 'person':

> We understand person to be a unique individual who is a self-initiating and self-determining subject. Each person is a distinct seat of subjectivity and, hence, independent of other persons and things. One's personhood signals one's autonomy. If, then, we were to apply without qualification the modern understanding of person to the trinitarian formula of 'one substance in three persons,' we could not avoid positing three distinct subjectivities only tenuously tied together. It would constitute a thinly veiled tritheism.[17]

This explanation is related to an understanding of the definition offered by Locke, in that it focuses upon the psychological characteristics which define individuals. The Lockean definition leaves behind the ontological categories of Boethius for something more empirical (at least, that is the assumption). The turn is to the 'inside' and self-reflection, and the effects that the individual can cause, rather than the ordering and relations of substances in reality.

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[15]C. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 86-90.

[16]J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding: Books II and IV*, reprint ed. ed. M. H. Calkins (LaSalle, ILL: Open Court, 1962), 246-65. One should also note the contribution of I. Kant, that persons are "not merely subjective ends, whose existence as an effect of our actions has a value for us; but such beings are objective ends, i.e., exists as ends in themselves" (*Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 2d ed. trans. J. W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 428. This had little positive effect on theological understanding because it still followed the same individualistic method set out by Descartes, Locke and Hume. Interestingly, Jenson offers a similar Kantian argument in "Evil as Person." *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 69 (1989): 31-42.

Kasper notes that the emphasis on the self-understanding of the subject moved the idea of person from an ontological to a psychological definition. This meant that the church was faced with a new use of language that contradicted the original theological intent. Instead of the Aristotelian language of substances and the ideas of rational and relational constitution as contributing to the concept of 'person', the modern psychological definition drew the idea of 'person' inside itself, focusing on the rationality and self-consciousness that are identifiable, regardless of the relationality that marks the external life. The attempt to ground thinking at this point on more clear and distinct factors, rather than metaphysically speculative ideas, was bound to cause confusion, since a decision to talk about the Trinity with terms that were now substantially misunderstood would be a challenge for the church.[18] The change of focus did not immediately permeate religious thought to the degree that the church could maintain discussion on the Trinity without a certain amount of trepidation about leaving behind the Medieval Scholasticism with its own precise parameters.

This partly helps to explain why the doctrine of the Trinity was to be rejected by many eighteenth and nineteenth century theologians as metaphysical nonsense. There was little correspondence between the usage of similar terms by the church—speaking in the terminology of the historic councils—and by contemporary scholarship. Over time, the

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[17]*God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 35.

[18]W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 287.

academic use became predominant, and the church succumbed to its usage.[19] Schleiermacher is a characteristic example of such a loss of the church's understanding of its terminology, since he demoted the Trinity to an appendix in his systematic theology, *The Christian Faith*, stating that it was "not an immediate utterance concerning the Christian self-consciousness."[20]

A Personalist Definition

A competing understanding of 'person' developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which rejected the focus that had been placed upon the subjective understanding of the 'person'. The movement was called personalism (represented by such figures as Buber, Ebner, and Rosenzweig). It highlighted the relational characteristics which compose personal existence, and derived conclusions about the nature of 'person' from them.[21] This seemed to be a retrieval of the earliest concepts of 'person' (though without any explicit influence), but using modern language and ideas.

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[19]H. U. von Balthasar, "On the Concept of Person," trans. P. Verhalen, *Communio* 13 (1986): 23-26.

[20]*The Christian Faith*, 2d German ed. trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. R. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 738. S. Coakley challenges this assumption about the lack of relationship between the Trinity and Christian experience in "Can God Be Experienced as Trinity," *Modern Churchman*, n. s. 28, no. 2 (1986): 11-23. See also Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 261-262, who shows how the various historical decisions, including those concerning the nature of person, led to the alienation of the Trinity from many Protestant and Catholic reflections about God.

[21]Existentialism is said to derive from this school. See J. Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*, 2d ed. (London: SCM, 1988), 193-209. Cf. Balthasar, 24-25. For more information on personalism, see M. Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. W. Kaufman (New York: Scribner, 1970); and D. O. Dahlstrom, ed. *Existential Personalism* (Washington, DC: American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1986). The personalist approach to anthropology and ethics is not

One personalist in particular, John Macmurray, has had an important impact upon English speaking theologians in recent years.[22] Colin Gunton has pointed out that Macmurray brings to light some radical ideas about the nature of personhood, because he rejects the dualism of cognition and experience, and maintains that ". . . the Self exists only in dynamic relation with the Other . . . . [T]he self is constituted by its relation to the Other, . . . it has its being in relationship."[23] What Gunton wants to show is how "the individual is on such an account relativized without being legislated out of existence."[24] Gunton is especially intrigued by the speculation that Macmurray's anthropological ideas were possibly influenced, albeit indirectly, by the theological origins of 'person' derived from his Calvinist background. The irony is that Macmurray's thought is now stimulating discussions of the social nature of 'person' and social trinitarianism.[25] Such ideas of 'person', with the emphasis on identity through community, have allowed theologians to

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restricted to existentialism though, as the example of John Macmurray will show. The term is used in this thesis to convey Macmurray's personalism in particular, but also to allow for the stronger existentialist leanings of other authors.

[22]*Persons in Relation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961; reprint, New Jersey, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979); and *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957; reprint, New Jersey, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978).

[23]Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 90-91, quoting Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 17.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., 92 ff. For a more in-depth analysis and evaluation of Macmurray, see J. Aves, "Persons in Relation: John Macmurray," in *Persons Divine and Human: Kings College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, eds. C. Schwöbel and C. Gunton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 120-137. It is of interest that Macmurray (e.g., *Self as Agent*, 135) has a conception of freedom based on the future, rather than the past. The priority of an eschatological ontology is a major component of Jenson's theology. There seems to be no connection between Jenson and Macmurray, however.

reconsider the theological roots of their trinitarian doctrine. Catherine LaCugna, for example, sees a definite link between a philosophy like that of Macmurray's and the work of Greek Orthodox theologian J. Zizioulas.[26] She writes:

> Zizioulas' theological perspective adds several elements to Macmurray's philosophy of person. Like Macmurray, Zizioulas understands that persons are constituted by relations. However, what is of ultimate significance for Zizioulas is that God (the Father) is the origin of all personhood. Human persons exist in the first place because God subsists as triune love. Further, according to Zizioulas' anthropology, the relationship of the human person to God—not to other human persons—is decisive.[27]

A parallel can be seen here with Jenson, who seems to have arrived at conclusions about personhood and relationality similar to those of Zizioulas, from his own independent study of the Cappadocians. The main difference is that Jenson's understanding of relations in the Godhead is psychologically constructed—referring to the inner constitution of the person—rather than personalist in construction—which sees external relational characteristics of persons as the logically primary constitutional element of personhood.[28] Although the personalist approach to a philosophy and theology of person is not the norm

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[26]J. Zizioulas, "On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood," in *Persons Divine and Human: Kings College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, eds. C. Schwöbel and C. Gunton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 46, states that "Personal identity is totally lost if isolated, for its ontological condition is relationship"; idem, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Theologians, no. 4 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), especially chap. 1.

[27]C. M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 265-66.

[28]R. W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982),105-07. Compare with J. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution." In *Trinitarian Theology Today*, ed. C. Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 44-60.

in academic or popular thought, it is becoming more widely known, and seems to be the rising star of many trinitarian theologies.[29]

Theological Options

There are two other ways to understand 'person' as it is applied to God. These have to do with the concept of 'person' in relation to the three *hypostases*. The first understanding of the Trinity is that God is one person, with three *hypostases* (where *hypostasis* can be translated by a number of different terms, such as mode of being [Barth and C. Welch[30]], distinct manner of subsisting [Rahner], and identity [Jenson]).[31] Such a concept has roots especially in the interpretation of the Augustinian tradition, based on the equality of the persons in the Godhead: "So they are each in each and all in each, and each in all and all in all, and all are one."[32] Thus, the use of the traditional formula, "one being, three persons" does not necessarily connote the sense of 'person' used at the time of

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[29]For example: R. L. Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), chap. 4; C. Plantinga Jr., "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, eds. R. J. Feenstra and C. Plantinga Jr. (Notre Dame: University Press, 1989), 21-47; K. Ware, "The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity," *Sobornost* 8, no. 2 (1986): 6-23; J. O'Donnell, "The Trinity as Divine Community," *Gregorianum* 69, no. 1 (1988): 5-34; J. J. O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); A. Kelly, *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God*, New Theology Series, ed. P. C. Phan, vol. 4 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989).

[30]*In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1952).

[31]From a conservative evangelical perspective, see S. J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 109 ff., who adopts a similar position about God's personhood being a singular, subjective self-consciousness which is applied to the Godhead, not the persons. His use of Hegel will be taken up later, when we look at Barth's influences.

Augustine for the modern reader. Given the modern understanding of 'person'—such as Locke's—it is better to talk about the divine subject as the one God, and hence use 'person' in reference to the Godhead. The three *hypostases* then need a new name which does not lead to the tritheistic implications that the modern sense of 'person' brings. This reasoning was employed by Barth, and will be examined below.

Karl Rahner has argued that the traditional formula does not have to be abandoned completely, but that it needs to be clearly explained as to what 'person' means: "It is evident that the regulation of language, which is necessary in a Church as a community of a shared social worship and confession, cannot be undertaken by the single theologian at will. The only thing to do is *also* to use the concept of person in the doctrine of the Trinity, and to defend it, to the extent of his powers, from misunderstandings . . . . We are then allowed to use such an explanatory concept [distinct manner of subsisting] without repudiating the concept that it explains."[33] This attempt to remain within the church's tradition while rearranging the terminology to fit the current usage is not simple or without problems. That is why there has also been a second approach taken as to the use of 'person' in the modern context.

The second contemporary interpretation of 'person' essentially follows the traditional church usage of the trinitarian formula. However, the three persons are also persons in the sense which the Enlightenment introduced, namely as subjects, or self-

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[32]Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI.ii.12.

conscious. Thus, "one being, three persons" may be used in the church without any change of traditional or contemporary meaning of the words. This use of 'person' is fuelled by the reappropriation of the Athanasian-Cappadocian arguments about relations of origin, as discussed earlier, and the similar philosophical personalism, like Macmurray's, which also sees relation to be the most important concept in defining 'person'. This is the growing trend amongst theologians (Pannenberg, Moltmann, LaCugna, Zizioulas, and Kasper are prominent thinkers who have adopted some form of this idea). This postmodern embrace of three conscious subjectivities as one being does not see tritheism to be a threat. Because relationships are constitutive of 'person', it is impossible to think of a person independently and alone. The principle of analogy must be seen to bear on this relational concept since theologians are taking an anthropological concept of relationality and positing an understanding of God.[34] Without entering into the metaphysical speculation of process theology and other holistic (monist) ideas of community, J. J. O'Donnell states a position that is representative of many theologians in this area. He quotes F. Bourassa: "Consciousness in God is thus both an essential act of knowledge and love common to the three persons, and personal consciousness exercised by each person,

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[33]K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (Kent, UK.: Burns & Oates; Herder & Herder, 1970), 108-09.

[34]Pannenberg bases this analogical language on revelation: "Analogy and Doxology," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1, trans. G. H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 211-38. See related considerations in W. Kasper, 94-99.

as consciousness of the self, according to the personal action of each which is infinitely conscious and free, as pure and spontaneous love, in the most perfect reciprocity."[35]

The conflict between the various understandings of 'person' is particularly acute in theology because of the implications that it can have for understanding the Trinity. While wanting to affirm the importance of relationality for the being of God, the modern idea of a self-conscious subject seems to mitigate the possibility of these being three persons in one being. This was the issue which Barth faced, and tried to address.

Karl Barth On Person

The background summary provided for understanding the development of the concept of 'person' into the modern era did not address the nineteenth century idealism which philosophers like Hegel constructed. However, it is important to look briefly at some of the main features of Hegel's thought as it related to the concept of 'person', since it had a profound impact on Barth's system in his *Church Dogmatics*. Hegel's proposal

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[35]J. J. O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, 111. F. Bourassa, "Personne et Conscience en Theologie Trinitaire," *Gregorianum* 55, no. 4 (1974): 709, is the reference for O'Donnell's quotation. It seems to be a liberal paraphrase of the following paragraph from that article:

> Donc la conscience comme acte 'personnel' c'est-à-dire *exercé par la personne* , est, en chaque Personne, (1) conscience de soi *comme Dieu*, conscience d'être Dieu: c'est l'acte 'essentiel' de connaissance et d'amour infini, commun aux trois Personnes, exercé par chacune 'en toute plénitude de Dieu'; (2) conscience de *soi* comme *distincte* des autres: c'est l'acte 'personnel' propre à chaque Personne; mais de telle sorte (3) que cette conscience de soi, en tant que telle, est totale et *réciproque communication*: chaque Personne ne peut être consciente de soi comme distincte que dans l'autre et pour l'autre: 'Je suis *dans le Père*'. Ce 'Je Suis' le Fils ne peut en être conscient que 'dans le Père', comme le 'Monogène dans le sein

for understanding 'person' was a result of the challenge made by J. G. Fichte, who had argued that God could not be a person because his infinity lacked a counterpart with which to compare himself (to exist over against someone else is limiting, and therefore is incompatible with infinity), which is an integral part of personhood.[36] Hegel's response was that person does not mean being limited by one's counterpart, but instead the giving or relationship of oneself (sacrifice) to one's counterpart.[37] An infinite God can do this more so than a finite being, and thus is infinitely more perfect as a person.[38] Hegel's trinitarian personhood was loosely based on the Augustinian analogies of the mind. Jenson summarises Hegel's model: "The rational subject posits the object, that is, that which is not itself, is not sheer transparent meaning; then the rational subject achieves itself as the *process*, the *act*, of rediscovering itself in the object, that is, of finding meaning in what is not merely as such meaningful; this event of reconciliation between reason-as-subject, and object-made-reasonable is living reason, spirit."[39] This is applied to God as

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du Père'; et réciproquement ce 'Je Suis' le Père ne peut le dire que dans son Verbe, c'est-à-dire en engendrant son Fils.

[36]On the challenge of atheism to theology, with a good historical summary, see W. Pannenberg, "Types of Atheism and their Theological Significance," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2, trans. G. H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 184-200. Specifically on Fichte's criticism of God's personhood see: F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7, *Fichte to Nietzsche*, paperback ed. (New York: Image; Doubleday, 1985), 83-86.

[37]G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols., trans. E. B. Speirs and J. B. Sanderson, ed. E. B. Speirs (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 3: 24-25. Cf. E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming*, trans. Scottish Academic Press, Monograph Supplements to the Scottish Journal of Theology, eds. T. F. Torrance and J. K. S. Reid (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 32 n.122.

[38]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 110.

[39]This is Jenson's explanation of Hegel, *Triune Identity*, 135.

the Mind, with history as the object, and the Spirit is the event of this self-consciousness. The outcome of Hegel's speculation was that the concept of person was found in the self-distinction of Mind in the World through eternity, which then produces Spirit. God can function as a Trinity with self-consciousness, when it is the one God who is the subject. Whatever judgements may be made about Hegel's system, it provided a clear answer to the two problems of atheism and the subjectively understood person. Barth would take the insights Hegel offered and put them into a Christian scheme.[40]

Barth's discussion of the appropriateness of using 'person' to talk about the three *hypostases* takes place in the Prolegomena to his *Church Dogmatics*.[41] He begins by arguing that the ambiguity of the term in the history of theology,[42] in combination with the modern concept of personality, has rendered the term practically useless for trinitarian discussion.[43] In a detailed historical survey,[44] in which he traces both the Latin and Greek

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[40]For more on Hegel, see B. de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, 257-62. See also F. Copleston, *History*, vol. 7, chaps., 10-11.

[41]K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. T. F. Torrance and G. Bromiley, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 1, 2d ed. trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 355-68.

[42] "Actually, what was meant by 'person' in the fourth century is not all that clear. In antiquity, the key term behind our word 'person' was *hypostasis*, a term with a stipulated reference employed so as to make a compromise between two schools of thought. The Cappadocian theologians had sharply distinguished between *hypostasis* and *ousia*; whereas Athanasius had used them interchangeably . . . . In sum, the term *hypostasis* equivocates." (T. Peters, *God as Trinity*, 34.)

[43]L. Porter, "On Keeping Persons in the Trinity," 535, points out that Barth's concerns are academically oriented. Porter thinks that this decision to question the word solely on the basis of dogmatic usefulness is not the primary concern of the church, and therefore questionable as a methodological decision.

[44]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 355-361.

terms and the later additions made by Boethius and the scholastics, as well as the reformers, and nineteenth century theologians, Barth comes to the conclusion:

> We must always ask seriously whether the argument of piety on the one side or the technical one on the other is weighty enough to cause the dogmatician to add to the thought of the Trinity, which is itself so difficult and which can be used only with so many reservations. We have no cause to want to outlaw the concept of person or to put it out of circulation. But we can apply it only in the sense of a practical abbreviation and as a reminder of the historical continuity of the problem.[45]

If he has to decide between the tradition and the modern problems of terminology, he will only reluctantly keep 'person' as a reminder of past mistakes. This is a ringing judgement on the relationship between the history of theology and contemporary system building.

He then goes on to show that the concepts of person and personal apply only to the one God. The three *hypostases* should be called "modes of being."[46] Perhaps, realising that some would criticise the use of 'mode,' Barth clearly stipulates a non-modalist intention:

> God's modes of being are not to be exchanged or confounded. In all three modes of being God is the one God both in himself and in relation to the world and man. But this one God is God three times in different ways, so different that it is only in his threefold difference that he is God, so different that this difference, this being in these three modes of being, is absolutely essential to Him, so different, then, that this difference is irremovable.[47]

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[45]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 359.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., 360. Barth also clearly rejects modalism on 382.

Again, Barth backs this up with detailed historical research about how the early church seemed to imply modes of being in their employment of the term *hypostasis*. In fact, he shows that *subsistentia* and *hypostasis* are really synonyms. He then traces the use of the idea of subsistence through the centuries, up to Calvin.[48] Thus, he can say that "We are not introducing a new concept but simply putting in the centre an auxiliary concept which has been used from the very beginning and with great emphasis in the analysis of the concept of person."[49] The changing around of words, for emphasis, is all that is needed to clarify the situation.

Barth does not want to dismiss personality (which he sees as a necessary implication when ascribing personhood to someone, or talking about 'person') in God. He states: "It is well to note at this early stage that what we today call the 'personality' of God belongs to the one unique essence of God which the doctrine of the Trinity does not seek to triple but rather to recognise in its simplicity."[50] In the chapter on the Holy Spirit, he also states, concerning the one God who is a personal subject:

> As God is in himself Father from all eternity, He begets Himself as the Son from all eternity. As he is the Son from all eternity, He is begotten of himself as the Father from all eternity. In this eternal begetting of Himself and being begotten of Himself, He posits Himself a third time as the Holy Spirit, i.e., as the love which unites Him in Himself. As He is the Father who begets the Son He brings forth the Spirit of love,

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[48]Ibid., 360-61. The importance of relationality as defining *hypostasis* is not ignored in Barth, though it seems only to play a minor role, in comparison to the idea of subsistence. To that end, one must question the comprehensiveness of his understanding of *tropos hyparxos*.

[49]Ibid., 359.

[50]Ibid., 350.

> for as He begets the Son, God already negates in Himself, from eternity, in His absolute simplicity, all loneliness, self-containment, or self-isolation.[51]

Without pressing the point too far, it can be noted that the single, self-conscious God in the uniting of himself with himself in the Word (from all eternity—read: infinity) gives forth the Spirit of love. This process of the single, divine subject has a remarkable parallel with the Hegelian trinitarian process between Mind, World History, and Spirit. Jenson has claimed that Barth indeed only took Hegel's model and inverted it: "Only put *Jesus* in place of Hegel's 'world' and you have the doctrine of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, volume 1/1—which observation takes nothing from the extraordinary ingenuity of Barth's move."[52] What has happened in Barth's theology is that he has reacted to the problem of the modern concept of person by moving it to the Godhead and then replacing the concept of three 'persons' (*hypostases*) with 'modes of being', so that Torrance can describe Barth's one God as "'the irreducible subject' of his revelation."[53] This is like the Absolute

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[51]Ibid., 483.

[52]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 136. In part three of *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future as Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1969), Jenson presents the central point of why the doctrine of the Trinity was important to Barth. Essentially God is an event of sorts (or, as Jüngel would say, God's 'being is in becoming'). This also points toward the ideas of Hegelian dialectics having a profound impact on Barth. The divine subject is a God in motion, as it were, and the modes of being are that action, which resembles Hegel's trinity, if not in *substance*, at least in *form*.

[53]T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 121.

Subject of Hegel. Further, God as absolute subject reveals himself through himself, producing the love which we are given through that self-revelation.[54]

Criticism of Barth's Theology of Divine Persons

There are a number of criticisms which have been made of Barth's use of 'person' for the Godhead and modes for the *hypostases*. Given the clash of modern (i.e. psychological or self-conscious agent as discussed in Locke) and personalist (as described by Macmurray and Zizioulas) views of 'person', the most pertinent questions can be asked about the acceptance of the modern view and the ascription of it to the one God, rather than in the traditional *hypostases*.

Rahner's critique does not challenge Barth as radically as later personalist theologians would challenge him. In fact, Rahner basically accepts most of Barth's presuppositions, such as opting for the modern usage of 'person',[55] and accepting that the modern usage cannot be used with the *hypostases*.[56] He seems more interested in modifying Barth's terminology so that it is "better, simpler, and more in harmony with the traditional language of the Church."[57] The differences are tangible but they do not substantially change the actual usage, only refine it.

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[54]Ibid., 113-14.

[55]Rahner, *The Trinity*, 106-09.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid., 110. See L. Porter, "On Keeping Persons in the Trinity," 533-41.

Walter Kasper has been critical of both Barth and Rahner for wanting to sacrifice the term 'person' for more technical terms that have no place in the kerygma. If the meaning of 'person' is "open to misunderstanding, the concept of 'distinct manner of subsistence' [and 'mode of being'] is unintelligible."[58] The term 'person' can be explicated in many ways. The 'mode of being' is not part of common discourse but is a technical term for specialists in theology and philosophy.[59] The further irony is that Barth has complained about the modern use of 'person', but still accepts it. In fact, by accepting it and looking at God as an absolute subject, he has to replace the three persons with some other terminology that retains most of the technical features of the original while dropping out the implied personal nature of each. This seems rather burdensome to theology, from Kasper's perspective, since the three persons can be distinct consciousnesses when the idea of relationality is clearly established as part of the equation. "This means that a triple *principium* or subject of the one consciousness must be accepted and, at the same time, that the three subjects cannot be simply unconscious but are conscious of themselves by means of the one consciousness (*principium pro*)."[60] This same point is made very specific in Weinandy, who points out that the incarnation presents us with Jesus who is

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[58]Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 288.

[59]L. Porter, "On Keeping Persons in the Trinity," 530-48, attempts to show the benefits of ambiguity in terminology, especially for trinitarian theology: "The problematic status of the term 'person' in Trinitarian thought is a positive virtue. Even the possible scandal that the doctrine of the Trinity might be misunderstood as polytheism only witnesses to the fact that Christian preaching must always remain a challenge to the mind, if at the same time an invitation to the heart" (547).

[60]Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 289.

fully a human person, and the second person of the Trinity. To maintain a balance of these two natures, the concept of the distinct centre of consciousness is integral.[61] He further sharpens the criticism of not using 'persons' by pointing out the importance of the term in the sense of the contemporary use: "The stress on subjectivity better enables us today to grasp that within the inner being of God there are truly three subjects and not three impersonal 'things'."[62]

LaCugna cannot see why Barth and Rahner felt compelled to choose between "the extreme individualism of the Cartesian centre of consciousness, and classical definitions like that of Boethius."[63] She suggests that the personalist philosophers offered an alternative route that would not require either extreme. The relational aspect of personhood is able to mitigate the offensiveness by making the centre of consciousness and rational substance relative to the communal aspect of personhood. The traditional and modern concepts are then able to contribute to the understanding of what makes a person unique, but are not the only qualities which make up the concept of 'person'. The absolute subject is modified into a relational subject by LaCugna's debt to personalism and Orthodox thinking on persons in communion.[64] This move could have allowed Barth to

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[61]T. G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 113-117.

[62]Ibid., 119. See W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), I.319-27, for a similar argument with different conclusions.

[63]LaCugna, *God For Us*," 254 f.

[64]Ibid., 255 ff.

keep persons in the Trinity, and to also take advantage of the benefits of the modern conception of 'person', without being overcome by its faults.

Barth's (and Rahner's) concept of 'person' has been subject to a wide variety of criticism. By trying to move personhood from the *hypostases* to the one being, Barth did two things. First, he allowed the modern, "extreme" concept of person to guide his theological reflection, without modification.[65] Second, he reorganised the Trinity in such a way that it makes preaching difficult ('modes of being' is confusing, except for theologians), and other doctrinal concepts such as the incarnation harder to understand.[66] It is clear that Barth has not succeeded in convincing most scholars to revise the concept of 'person' as it is used when talking about God. Many are returning to the Nicene formula and blending it with the personalism that is a vital part of postmodern thinking. The language of persons has much more life in it than Barth realised.[67] Jenson has attempted to carry on Barth's project without maintaining the dualism between classical and modern concepts of person. It is to his proposal that attention must now turn.

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[65]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 295-296, 304.

[66]Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ*, 288. On the problem of understanding the Incarnation see Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*, 113-117.

[67]One of Barth's problems is that he had a truncated understanding of religious language. His fear of natural theology (which he narrowly defined in terms of the traditional Thomistic arguments) did not account for the fact that language itself makes natural theology necessary. On that more general problem in Barth see R. F. Aldwinckle, "Karl Barth and Religious Language," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11, no. 3 (1965): 164-173; and R. Forsman, "Karl Barth on the Meaningfulness of Religious Language," unpublished paper.

CHAPTER THREE

ROBERT W. JENSON'S TRIUNE IDENTITIES

In this chapter an outline of the place of the *hypostases* in Jenson's trinitarian doctrine will be presented. The unity of the Godhead will only be touched upon insofar as it is important to understand his concept of 'person' (as opposed to *hypostasis*) as it applies to God. There are two sets of material which will be used for consideration of Jenson's doctrine of God. First, his presuppositions concerning theological method and God will be presented in order to understand his exegesis of scripture and subsequent applications of it to dogmatic problems. Needless to say, it is almost impossible to develop a doctrine of God without some pre-formed ideas about who God is, and so clarifying them in advance helps to prevent confusion. Jenson's presuppositions will need to be clear so that later criticism can be grounded in his specific position. The second set of material is that already presented in chapter one, concerning the notion of 'person'. Those findings will help to clarify Jenson's main themes and tools for constructing a theology of divine person(s). The *hypostasis* of the Holy Spirit will be explained in particular detail in this chapter, so as to serve as a specific example which can be tested later, when critical analysis is conducted on Jenson's work.

Hellenism vs. Christianity: The Paradigm for the Dogmatic Analysis

One of the central problems which guided Barth's approach to his *Church Dogmatics* was a profound distrust of natural theology. The rational access to knowledge of God was seen to be a feature of Hellenistic philosophising, rather than the revelation of the Word: "The possibility of knowledge of God's Word lies in God's Word and nowhere else."[1] This means that the Word of God must be knowable, which infers there is some capacity for people to hear it and understand it: "The proof of the knowability of the Word consists in confessing it."[2] Barth's definition of natural theology, therefore, was very narrow, concerned only with the classic Thomistic arguments about human initiative and capability of rationally 'finding' God. Jenson affirms this Barthian separation of theology from philosophy (and other academic disciplines), including the experiential basis which serves as his alternative for knowing God:

> I should confess that I belong with them [Barthians], and indicate briefly why . . . . "The Father knows the Son, and the Son the Father, as *other* than himself, and so objectively. This objectivity of God to himself is in fact and by God's choice . . . the same event as the confrontation between the Father and the man Jesus . . . . Thus the subject-object relation between us and the man Jesus reflects the subject-object relation between God the Father and God the Son.[3]

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[1]K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. T. F. Torrance and G. Bromiley, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 1, 2d ed. trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 222.

[2]Ibid., 241.

[3]*God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future as Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1969), 82.

The basis for knowledge of God is in the presentation of the triune relationship which is worked out in history, and thus able to be appropriated by humanity. It is knowledge that is given to the world.[4]

Jenson is convinced that the classic Greek rationalistic approach to God (natural theology) is completely incompatible with the Christian experiential approach which is seen in the kerygma of the Bible. This rejection of natural theology is not merely a Barthian commitment, but part of Jenson's understanding of historical study by means of narrative method.[5] The summary that M. R. Barnes[6] gives of the methodology for narrative historical research used in a number of current systematic theologians' work can be applied to Jenson's theology. The example he uses to explain these points is the so-called clash between Western theology, at the time of Augustine, and Eastern theology (this can be applied especially to

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[4]Jenson's kerygmatic, (Hegelian) dialectical theology is presented directly in the above citations, and helpfully critiqued in F. Schott's *God Is Love: The Contemporary Theological Movement of Interpreting the Trinity as God's Relational Being* (Th.D. Diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1990), 38-47; 107-122.

It might seem more likely that he would follow a Kierkegaardian dialectic, due to his Barthian methodology (see S. Grenz and R. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 67). However, Jenson is clear that, in terms of delineating the concept of person, the Hegelian tradition, with its (tenuous) Augustinian roots, is his preferred starting point.

[5]The book which set forth Jenson's narrative agenda was *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973; reprint, Ramsey, NJ: Sigler Press, 1989).

[6]"Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237-50.

Jenson's case, since he would agree that the Augustinian tradition was contradictory to the Eastern church[7]).

According to Barnes, generally, Augustine is seen by systematicians as representative of the appropriation of natural theology (of the Neo-Platonic type) in such a way as to undermine useful Christian reflection that is biblically true. The corollary belief is that Augustine did this while rejecting (or ignoring) the more biblically true Cappadocian reasoning because he could not read Greek, and therefore could not understand the Eastern writers.

Why is this belief about Augustine's theological rejection of the East acceptable to many theologians? Barnes' first point is that "modern appropriations of Augustine depend upon broad, general characterisations of Augustine's theology."[8] The main components that direct the utilisation of such generalised presentations of historical theology are: 1) the belief that "polar opposites" comprise the correct form for understanding of the details of history—that history is usually a conflict of these opposites—and 2) by using polar opposites, a "synthesised account of the development of doctrine" can be given—that the conflict of polar opposite ideas in history yields a dialectical movement of the content of the history of ideas. In other words, these two points are "grounded in the belief that ideas 'out there' in the past really existed in polarities" and that these polarities can describe accurately and clearly the relationships of the ideas.[9]

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[7]R. W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 114-131.

[8]Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Theology," 239.

[9]Ibid.

Barnes second point is that the generalisations of ideas, especially into polar opposites, are discovered through narrative forms of historical research. Barnes calls these "architectonic narrative forms." There are three pillars that constitute such a method: 1) The concept of 'paradigm shifts' favours a narrative description of history.[10] 2) Because details are not as important as the generalisations that doctrine presents, there is a treatment of the specifics of doctrines as mere epiphenomena, or by-products, of the more important paradigm represented in the debates of the time. This shows that facts can be reduced to ideology (what Barnes calls the "internal logic of an idea," by which he refers to general ideas, or paradigms), rather than *vice versa*. 3) The narrative description of these ideas is comprehensive, because they can be applied to all subsequent developments in history.[11]

Jenson fits Barnes' description not only in terms of his interpretation of Augustine,[12] but also in the disjunction between biblical and Hellenistic culture. He sees Western culture as

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[10]On the nature of paradigms and their importance for understanding the process of change and development see H. Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium*, trans. P. Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 123-206. Questions raised about the coherence of this interpretation of the development of ideas and theories in both science and theology can be found in S. Uda, "Is a Paradigm Approach Relevant to the Appraisal of Contemporary Theology?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 221-239; M. Dempster, "Paradigm Shifts and Hermeneutics," *Pneuma* 15 (1993): 129-135; D. Ratzsch, *Philosophy of Science: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective*, Contours of Christian Philosophy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

[11]Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Theology," 241.

[12]The example of Augustine, with no accompanying detail or references, is given here only as the specific example, by Barnes, of how Jenson's narrative method works for general historical study. The same method could be applied to other figures who are analysed by Jenson. While this thesis cannot go into details about the problem of Augustine in contemporary theology, the articles listed in chapter two (footnote 12) will help to show why Jenson has sided with systematicians against Augustine. Barnes' article is the best survey of this problem.

trying to embrace these two incompatible systems in an ill-matched marriage: "Christian reflection was responsible to two patently different theological heritages. One was the heritage of Olympian religion and its theology, the latter called then and still 'philosophy'; the other was the heritage of Mosaic-prophetic religion, as this was carried by the mission of Jesus' resurrection, called then and still 'the gospel'."[13] Jenson is convinced that the divorce of these two types is to be applauded and met with renewed Christian thought that is opposed at all angles to the possible influence of non-Christian beliefs and ideas (his primary concern, in this regard, is whether God is timeless or infinite).[14] One of the problems which can result from a narrative historical method, as Barnes describes it, is that when one looks for paradigms and stories to explain why ideas are the way they are, history then becomes a "conversation between a ventriloquist and her or his prop."[15]

Infinity of God

Jenson's second presupposition, after his narrative method of interpreting history as the conflict between Christianity and Hellenistic natural theology, concerns a distinguishing feature of revelation. Its narrative character assumes God to be part of

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[13]R. W. Jenson, "The Logic of the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Dialog* 26, no. 4 (1987): 245.

[14]How this can be done, using Barth as the successful example, is shown in R. W. Jenson, "The Christian Doctrine of God," in *Keeping the Faith: Centenary of Lux Mundi*; ed. G. Wainwright (Philadelphia and Allison Park: Fortress and Pickwick Publications, 1988), 47 f. One specific point, the rejection of the *logos asarkos* will be discussed in the next chapter.

[15]Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Theology," 244.

time—acting in and through time—not abstracted from it.[16] This presupposition is also developed out of his reading of Barth.[17] The question of whether God is timeless (a standard Greek assumption) or acts in time presents the basic difference between a biblical concept of revelation and most others. Jenson sees, as a result of the belief in timelessness, the separation of God from creation, leaving him unable to interact with it. Only if God can have time, can he interact with creation. This dichotomy, which Jenson sets up, is based on the problem of having an impassible God in a world of change. Therefore, to Jenson, timelessness means impassibility. The important counter-example of impassibility for the Christian church is the incarnation, where God is seen living and walking among people. A timeless god could not do such a thing, at least not without losing its deity.

A further contrast with philosophical theology is that, in the Bible, God is seen as one who makes promises and is involved in the future by the making of promises (indeed, God is the future for Jenson).[18] This eschatological nature of revelation further places time within God's nature.

Jenson does not make God a finite creature though. It must be remembered that God transcends time in that he has created it. This allows Jenson to steer clear of process

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[16]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 24-25.

[17]See Jenson, *God After God*, chap. 8, and W. J. Hill's commentary on this in *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1982), 126-28.

[18]Ibid., 170-76.

theology.[19] Because God is not finite like the universe, but yet "has time" according to scripture, then God must be temporally infinite.[20]

God As an Event

Another distinguishing feature of God's self-revelation, in Jenson's view, is the context of that revelation. The biblical narrative locates God's revelation within the life of the nation of Israel and her forerunners (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). This is done both by epiphanies to individuals (e.g. Moses) and through God's faithfulness as the God of Israel (a typical prophetic theme, it will be discussed later, under the concept of Spirit in the Old Testament). Jenson especially uses the faithful actions and promises to show how the question "who is God?" is answered in scripture. The basic Old Testament answer was, "whoever got us out of Egypt."[21] God's name was also God's action (i.e., faithfulness).[22] This description of God links specific action to his nature, just as the Priestly tradition conceived of him as "I am," or Yahweh (which indicated his complete action—not just in the Exodus, but in all redemptive activity).

The opposite is generally true of other religions, in Israel's' time[23] and throughout history. Identification of god in philosophical theology, for example, is understood as

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[19]Jenson, "The Logic of the Doctrine of the Trinity," 249.

[20]R. Jenson, "Creation as a Triune Act," *Word and World* 2, no. 1 (1982): 34-42.

[21]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 7.

[22]Ibid., 6.

[23]Ibid., 5.

abstraction from particularity. Terminology like omnipotence, omniscience, timelessness, etc., generalises and identifies characteristics and knowledge *about* God.[24] Biblical theology, as Jenson does it, makes revelation in history the identity of the subject.[25] Thus revelation is an event, which necessarily leads to understanding God as action or event (a form of Barthian Neo-Orthodoxy). Jenson sees the life of Jesus as the work of God: "Surely this tendency is biblically right, at least by that understanding of the biblical witness sketched above. Stipulating an *event* as the subject of 'God' imposes a task of ontological revision to which we must eventually turn . . . ."[26] Hence, the renaming of the Nicene slogan (one *homoousion*, three *hypostases*) for today, by Jenson, is "One event, God, of three identities."[27]

Eschatological Ontology

A third unique feature of biblical revelation forms the last presupposition to be highlighted here. The emphasis on the role of eschatology is one of the features of twentieth century systematic theology, seen in different ways in Moltmann, Pannenberg,

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[24]An contemporary example is R. Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), chap. 6. Jenson's review of this book is scathing: "The Christian God," *First Things* 55 (1995): 63.

[25]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 22.

[26]Ibid., 114.

[27]Ibid. (Again, this is based in Barth's influence: "God, said Barth, is a triune history," attributed by Jenson in "The Logic of the Doctrine of the Trinity," 249).

Metz, and Barth.[28] In Jenson's theology, it is an implication of the first two points, by stressing the biblical narrative and its acceptance of a temporally infinite God. The Bible's revelation is of a historical and faithful God,[29] not of a "persistent Beginning."[30] Two focal points of the biblical narrative are the Exodus and Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. These events are part of the history of the world. Moreover, when reading the Bible, it becomes increasingly clear that this history is actually that of God, whose action is also his name. Most religions rely on a revelation in history, but do not go so far as to identify God himself as that revelation.[31] The language of the Bible also uses tenses in their "real time" as opposed to more mythic constructions.[32] This brings the historicity of the Bible to the forefront. For Jenson, the mythic god (as opposed to the real, historical God) and the Persistent Beginning (from Greek philosophy), are both characterised by attributes of indivisibility, unchangeableness, and timelessness, cannot fit within the parameters set forth by the Bible.

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[28]Schott, *God Is Love*, 204-213. For more detail on the eschatological and temporally infinite God which Jenson derives from scripture and history, see J. Albright, "The Story of the Triune God: Time and Eternity in Robert Jenson's Theology," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26, no. 1 (1996): 36-54. The whole question of time and eternity, whether from an eschatological position or not, has been of great importance in theology in this century. Some of the major positions and their importance are discussed in detail in P. Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); W. Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 1989); and B. Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 1991).

[29]Ibid., 39.

[30]Ibid., Chapter 2.

[31]Ibid., 22.

[32]Ibid., 21-22.

The narrow limits of historicity and the boundlessness of the idea of infinite eternity exclude all such non-biblical ideas of God as myth[33] or impassible. If God acts in history, then his actions must be in time, and, in some sense passable (such as God changing his mind regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18). This, in conjunction with the biblical emphasis on faithfulness and hope, then points to the God of scripture as primarily a God who is eschatological. Indeed, Jenson can state unequivocally that "instead of interpreting Christ's deity as a separate entity that always *was*—and preceding analogously with the Spirit—we should interpret it as a final *outcome*, and just *so* as eternal . . . ."[34]

Biblical Background of God's Identities

When developing a doctrine of the Trinity, the church must begin with the biblical data. This is primary trinitarianism, since, as noted above, the Bible is the story of God, not about God.[35] Critical reflection on scripture is a second-level discipline which is performed as a consequence of the implications of the application of the biblical truths in

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[33]This use of myth appears to be the more popular use of the term, rather than a technical use referring to literary genre. Jenson sees God's timelessness as false, and therefore the term connotes a false view of God.

[34]Ibid., 140.

[35]Jenson, "The God Question," *Lutheran Forum* 26, no. 4 (1992): 49.

new ways (through contact with different cultures and philosophical systems, for example).[36]

One of the important contributions of Karl Barth to Jenson's theology has been the identification of God's self-revelation with our ability to have an actual understanding of God in himself. As T. F. Torrance describes it, one of the sad effects of late Patristic, Medieval and Enlightenment epistemology is that it drove "a wedge between the historical and ontological factors or ingredients in God's triune self-revelation through Christ and for the Spirit, so that an understanding of what God is for us is severed from what God is in himself."[37] When God's being is not able to interact with time (this is radical impassibility), then the Trinity becomes a doctrine of an unknowable God. Through Barth's work, a renewal of the pursuit of epistemological unity between "form and being" (to use Torrance's words), or history and ontology, has found its place in a number of major theologians' work. Jenson describes Barth's understanding of the knowledge of God through his revelation:

> . . . the revelation whose possibility is thus grasped as the reality of God himself is not any revelation, it is *that* event of which the scripture tells as revelation—it is precisely in order to ensure that this is not burked that Barth puts the doctrine of the trinity at the beginning. The event of revelation has a plot: it is Jesus' birth, work, crucifixion and resurrection. That what God reveals about himself is that he can reveal himself as he *has* revealed himself, means concretely that God is a life with this

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[36]Ibid., xii-xiii and 10-18. Theology is also doxological, since it joins the church in addressing itself to the God who has revealed himself, and who calls on us to worship him. Critical reflection is an aid to this end. See R. W. Jenson, "The Point of Trinitarian Theology," in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, ed. C. Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 31-43.

[37]*The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 35.

> plot and no other. Barth's doctrine of the Trinity *identifies* God as the one whose being is the occurrence among us, and so for us, of Jesus' death and resurrection.[38]

This provides an important place for the biblical concept of God as definitive for identifying what is authentic Christian belief.

If the metaphysical presupposition of God's infinity is correct, then the Bible as witness to God's self-revelation will likely give a clue to who God is in terms of eternity. And if God's own story is given because only God as Transcendence can determine to reveal himself to a needful humanity (which cannot reason itself to God) then a basic question to ask is, "Who is this God and how is he named?" Jenson needs only to look to the foundation of biblical faith for the initial formulation of an answer. Moses' question to God, as he was commissioned to lead the Exodus from Egypt, was, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'the God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13 f.).[39] God's answer is "Yahweh," which Jenson explains is a proper name. However, all proper names require identifying descriptors.[40] Herein begins Jenson's explanation of the biblical narrative: God's self-revelation becomes a series of identifying descriptors so that Israel, and later

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[38]"Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Ford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 45. Jenson's *Alpha and Omega* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), rehearses Barth's doctrine of election, with important early conclusions which Jenson made about his concept of revelation as fulfilled through the Christ event.

[39]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 2.

the church, can know specifically whom they are worshipping, praying to, and proclaiming as the one true God.[41] The discourse of the church is founded upon a revealed set of these identifying descriptors which are learned directly from God.

The naming of God in the Old Testament, Jenson shows, goes beyond the Exodus. However, it is not the proper name of God which is multiplied in the rest of the Old Testament: that always remains Yahweh. As noted earlier, Jenson contrasts the nature of God's name in the Bible with other names for God. The basic meaning of 'Yahweh' as it develops in early Christian thought is 'God's acts in Israel.' Yahweh is his acts. As the history of Israel continued, the main descriptor, the narration of God's election of Israel through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Exodus, became the foundation of Israel's existence and her hope for the future. Further descriptors enhanced but did not replace this event. The recitation of this narrative was key to remembering the name of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).[42]

When movement is made from Old Testament to New Testament, a new identifying descriptor is applied to God which has the same magnitude, or weight, as that of the Exodus. God is now "whoever raised Jesus from the dead." The new descriptor is as prevalent in the New Testament as the Exodus was in the Old Testament, but does not replace it. They stand together, unifying and verifying the consistent revelation of God.

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[40]*The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Identity," by A. Stroll. See some preliminary language philosophy applied in R. W. Jenson *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

[41]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 3-4.

The subject of God remains, though different identifying descriptors and conceptual words provide a more precise understanding of this name.[43]

The description that is new, is that God's name is now Jesus' name. Jenson contends that this is not a new name, but a "new [kind] of naming." The way this happens is that 'Yahweh' originally was a name in use. However, "as the identification of the true God over against other claimants ceased to be a daily challenge, and . . . therefore ceased to be a daily necessity, actual pronunciation of the name ceased."[44] The early church, because of its mission, needed to speak God's name again (not only in prayer and worship, but also in baptism, "exorcism, healing . . . discipline . . . and forgiveness."). Jesus' name is invoked in the same way that Yahweh was called upon in the Old Testament (e.g. Joel 2:32).[45] Like the addition of the resurrection as an identifying descriptor, the use of Jesus' name does not replace 'Yahweh', but stands with it. Calling on Jesus is calling on God, because his name is used for the same functions. Again, it is seen that God's name ('Jesus') is his action.[46]

The Holy Spirit, from the narrative perspective, is also part of God's self-revelation, seen most emphatically at Pentecost (Acts 2). Jenson notes that the actual story of Pentecost itself is less important than the interpretation of it given by Luke. The

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[42]Ibid., 6-7.

[43]An illuminating section on why the variety of themes, or theologies, are not a problem of inconsistency is explained using a similar linguistic argument, ibid., 8.

[44]Ibid., 7.

[45]Ibid., 8-10.

Pentecost experience was understood as the fulfilment of Israel's expectation that the Spirit of God would come to make them a prophetic nation.[47] With a sustained exegetical analysis of 'spirit' in the Old Testament, Jenson shows how 'God' and 'Spirit' were a "linguistic pair" which brought and would bring wisdom and prophecy in power. The hope in God's faithfulness is the hope of his creative Spirit (i.e., Isaiah 57:16; Haggai 2:4-8; etc.). This hope was both messianic (Isaiah 42:1) and communal (Joel 2:28-32).[48]

The New Testament use of 'Spirit' is continuous with the Old Testament usage, except that the Spirit has now arrived—is a present reality and experience—through Pentecost, as prophesied. The relationship of 'Spirit' and 'Jesus' is of the same form as that of 'God' and 'Spirit' in the Old Testament (e.g. Romans 8:1-27). Jenson summarises his understanding of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament this way:

> (1) The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the creating word, both of the Hebrew prophets and of the church; (2) the Holy Spirit is poured out in baptism, to make a prophetic community;[49] (3) the Holy Spirit is the bond of this community; (4) the Holy Spirit is the power of the resurrection both now and eternally; and (5) the Holy Spirit is all these things because he is the Spirit of Christ.[50]

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[46]Ibid., 9.

[47]R. W. Jenson, "The Holy Spirit," in *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols., eds. C. E. Braaten and R. W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), II.109-114.

[48]Ibid., 113-114.

[49]For Jenson's detailed explanation of this point, see *Visible Words: The Interpretation and Practice of Christian Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 26-51.

[50]Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, II.120.

From this sustained linguistic interpretation of scripture, the trinitarian relationships are established as the activity of God in his revelation to his elect.[51] It is notably different from traditional forms of trinitarian analysis, which try to show the individual deity of each person, because of their stress on the equality of each person to the Father (Yahweh).[52] Jenson's approach is to stress the unity of each through their reciprocal relationships established in the promise of Yahweh, fulfilled in the hope of the resurrection, and awaited in fullness with the final community of the Spirit. "The God of the gospel is the Hope at the beginning of all things, in which we and all things are open to our fulfillment; he is the love which will be that Fulfillment; and he is the Faithfulness of Jesus the Israelite, which within time's sequences reconciles this Beginning and this End."[53]

The Historical Decisions of the Church

The doctrine of the Trinity is primarily the story of the early church confronting Hellenistic culture with this new definition and belief in God. Beginning with the Apologists and ending with Augustine, most of the basic components which make up the doctrine were added and refined during this era. The bulk of *The Triune Identity* is a recital of that history, interspersed with liberal amounts of commentary and Jenson's own contributions to the debate. While space does not permit a thorough account of what

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[51]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 21-28.

[52]The classic Protestant work of this century is A. C. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962).

[53]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 25.

happened in the early church,[54] nor even how Jenson perceives the history, some examination of his influences is merited. While Jenson does give credit to the Latin theologian Tertullian for helping to provide language with which a Hellenistic culture could begin to talk about the Trinity, he ultimately judges the content of the Western tradition which sprang from Tertullian and later Augustine as conceptually "bland."[55]

Jenson warms up when he finally turns to the Eastern Fathers. First, Athanasius' great contribution was the Greek terminology of *ousia* and *hypostases*, as well as the insistence that the essential feature of the individual *hypostases* was relational: The Father could not be Father if there were no Son, and *vice versa*. This helps to explain why the Father is not the source of the Godhead, in the way the various lines of subordinationism were conceiving it. The three must be, in order for God to be.[56]

It is with the Cappadocians, though, that Jenson finds particular help in clarifying the intricacies of the term *hypostasis*. He is particularly concerned with Gregory of Nyssa, whose philosophical background, and generally superior skills as a thinker, were of great importance for the understanding of the three persons. Following Athanasius, Gregory saw the relationships of the three to be constitutive of their deity. He was willing to go so far as to say that the Godhead, or deity, was to be summed up as the movement or activity

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[54]But see J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, 100-600* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971), 172-225. Also helpful is his *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993), esp. 231-48.

[55]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 57-74.

of the three.[57] Jenson's own interpretation of Gregory is thus: "The *hypostases* are Jesus and the transcendent Will he called *Father* and the Spirit of their future for us."[58] The Father is the source of the Son's and the Spirit's Godhead; the Son is the recipient of the Father's Godhead; and the Spirit is the spirit of the Son's possession of the Father's Godhead. Thus the subsistent relations make up the oneness of God.

The activity which is the relations of the three *hypostases*, and which constitutes the nature of God, is temporal.[59] Infinity is conceivable as the best answer to how God can have time. "The infinity that is, according to Gregory, God's *ousia*, is *temporal* infinity. God is not infinite because he timelessly *extends* to all reality, but because time cannot exhaust or keep up with his activity: 'The transcendent and blessed Life has neither interior measure nor compass, for no temporal extension can keep pace with it.'"[60] The relations of the three persons are such that all possibility is open to them. The immanent Trinity is the future, eschatologically anticipated Trinity. Time's proper reality is futurity, and therefore, it is God, who is the hope and "sheer possibility" which humanity must lean on. Jenson quotes Gregory's *Contra Eunomius* to justify and show that his own conception of a temporally infinite, eschatological God is what the Church has always

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[56]Ibid., 88-89. Appropriate translations of Athanasius are provided in the text.

[57]Gregory of Nyssa, "Concerning We Should Think of Saying That There Are not Three Gods to Ablabius," ed. and trans. by W. G. Rusch, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 154.

[58]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 105-06.

[59]Ibid., 107-08.

[60]Ibid., 165.

affirmed: "So we must ask [the Arians] why they define God's being by its having no beginning and not by its having no end . . . . Indeed, if they must divide eternity, let them reverse their doctrine and reckon endless futurity the mark of deity . . ., finding their axioms in what is to come and is real in hope, rather than in what is past and old."[61] Because God escapes all limits, God always has a future.

Hypostases as Identities: Jenson's Own Contribution

Jenson's contribution to the understanding of the Trinity relies heavily upon the previous points which he sees in Gregory of Nyssa, and other theologians from the early church. However, the three *hypostases* and their relationship to the one divine *ousia* are derived from a much broader set of parameters than that used by Gregory of Nyssa or the biblical description of God's work in salvation history.

Jenson translates *hypostasis* not as 'person', as does church tradition, but instead proposes that, if the Cappadocian distinctions concerning the *hypostases* as subsistent relations in God are to be understood properly, then a better term is *identity*. He suggests three parts to the concept of identity which justify this: First, an identity is able to be conceived apart from the plurality of other identities. Simply put, the Father is seen to be something different from the Son or the Spirit. This distinctness is made possible through the linguistic method of applying names and identifying descriptors, as was done in the biblical world. However, even though there are three identities, the predicates used in

[61]Ibid., 165-66.

reference to the three in God must be made unambiguous "by running them across all three identities."[62]

Second, an identity must be able to be repeatably identified. God must always be identifiable as God in order for him to be God. This repeatability is always in the context of time, so that no timeless identity is ever predicated of God.[63]

Finally, identity should be interpreted as personal existence. Here the self-consciousness of modern thought plays a role, translated through the *Dasein* of existentialism.[64] Jenson specifies the place of this third part of identity: "that there is even one identity of God means that God is personal, that he *is* God in that he *does* Godhead, in that he chooses himself as God." The Godhead is called personal by means of the identities. Jenson is letting the analogy of 'person' in philosophical anthropology be applied to God. Because identity is related to the interpretation of personal existence, then the event of God—the three *hypostases*—must be personal, since the threefold repeated "being of God" is always of the same being. The three *hypostases* do not refer so much to individual entities as to the repeated event of "being" God.[65]

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[62]Ibid., 109. This is much the same argument that Barth uses to explain how the revelation of God must be conceived as triune: God is revealed inasmuch as he is the revealer, revealed, and revealedness, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1, 295-304.

[63]Ibid., 109-110.

[64]Ibid., 110. Jenson's debt to Sartre in a similar context is also made in "Three Identities of One Action," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): 13. His respect of Heidegger is also important in this context; see Albright, "The Story of the Triune God," 36-54.

[65]Ibid., 110-11.

This raises the same type of question—as to whether God is a person—that Fichte raised: can God really be individualised by a relative difference to other persons when he is infinite, while all other persons are finite (otherwise, there is more than one god, thus nullifying the Christian God)? In chapter one, it was shown that Hegel responded negatively, and rejected Fichte's assumption that 'person' was defined by the limitation which another gives to the self-interpretation of personal existence, by arguing instead that the self-giving of one to another is the determination of personal existence. Jenson accepts a form of this argument, because he allows that the meeting of Jesus and the Father (and the Spirit of their encounter) is such an eternal and infinite relationship between two identities that 'person' can then be ascribed to God. The relationship of Father to Jesus is "bounded" or finite in that Jesus' life is embodied.[66] It is also eternal in that Jesus is alive, the resurrection being the foil against Fichte's argument. Therefore, Jenson at once affirms the argument of Fichte about the need for one identity to be seen over against another when talking of 'person', but denies it any weight against the existence of God; as well he affirms Hegel's argument that the relationship of the three identities in self-giving provides the foundation for knowing the Trinity of God.[67]

The one, personal, triune God is always interpreted christocentrically by Jenson (following Barth's method). This is important to the interpretation of the Trinity because

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[66]R. W. Jenson, "The Body of God's Presence: A Trinitarian Theory," in *Creation, Christ, and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance*, ed. R. A. McKinney (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 82-91. See also Jenson, *Visible Words*, which provides a discussion of the importance of God's body for the sacraments.

there would seem to be something suspicious about calling God personal over against three impersonal identities: "The 'a person' that God is, is the human person Jesus, the Son. The triune event that God is, is by its triunity a person, this one. We need not think of the other identities, of the Father or the Spirit, as, with respect to their distinction from one another, individual personal beings in the modern sense."[68] The person Jesus is the object of God. God, the subject, "achieves itself as the *process* . . . of rediscovering ['finding meaning in'] itself in the object . . . . This reconciliation of reason-as-subject with object-made-reasonable, is living reason, spirit."[69] Such a psychological derivation of personhood in the Trinity is, of course, Hegelian.[70] Stated ontologically, "the Son is epistemologically prior. The Father has the cntic priority; he is the given transcendence to Jesus, and the given of hope and love. But the Spirit has the metaphysical priority; the only definition of God in scripture is that 'God is Spirit' (John 4:24). It is this structure of priorities that is the 'substantiality of God."[71]

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[67]This is presented in Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics* I.169-72.

[68]Ibid., 170-71.

[69]Ibid., 152 f.

[70]Jenson is convinced that no conception of person in respect to God is possible other than the psychological-dialectical model of Hegel, ibid., 170. It should be noted that even though this approach is attributed to Augustine, it is not what Augustine was trying to achieve in his treatise *De Trinitate*. This reasoning from psychological relationships is Anselmian, with support from Thomas Aquinas. Hegel's dialectical understanding of God is presented in G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols., trans. E. B. Speirs and J. B. Sanderson, ed. E. B. Speirs (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 3.2-6.

[71]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 167.

These three form an eternal action that is temporally infinite, and known as such through the ever-present Jesus who is risen from the dead. While Jenson rejects Hegel's ideas as they were originally applied to the "mind" of a timeless deity, he believes that simply by moving the dialectic from inside God to the temporal activity of creation, God's personhood can still be achieved, without the problems that accompany a timeless *nous*.[72] These ideas hold not only to a Hegelian dialectic of personhood, but also are clearly Western by their placement of the Holy Spirit as the spirit of the Son and Father's future. This is directly indebted to the *Filioque* clause that was added to the Constantinopolitan Creed.[73]

The Holy Spirit in Jenson's Trinity

The sense of *hypostasis* which Jenson derives means that the Holy Spirit (as well as the Father[74]) is not a person as would be thought of by current, popular thought. The Spirit is impersonal, since only Jesus is personal.

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[72]See J. E. B. Fullenwieder, "Against an Ontological Interpretation of the Name of God: An Examination of Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Proposals" (M.S.T., Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, 1994), 150.

[73]A historical study from a Roman Catholic perspective on the development of the *Filioque* is B. de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, vol. 1, *Studies in Historical Theology*, trans. E. J. Fortman (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications), 160-68. When one compares traditional Roman Catholic terminology concerning the Spirit with Jenson's own discussion, it might appear that the two are talking about very similar ideas. However, whereas Jenson does derive the Spirit from the Father and the Son, his impersonal Spirit is contrasted with traditional Roman dogma, which does attribute personal characteristics to the Spirit. This can be seen by reading C. Massabki, *Who is the Holy Spirit?* trans. J. Auricchio (New York: Alba House, 1979), particularly chapter two.

[74]Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, I.169-172.

As a sample of the concept of identity in Jenson's usage, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit will be presented according to his exposition: "In the Bible generally, the 'Spirit' is God as the power of the future to overturn what already is, and just so fulfil it. The Spirit is indeed a present reality. But *what* is present is that there is a Goal and that we therein are free from all bondage to what is."[75] Jenson does refer to 'person' when he writes about the Holy Spirit, but with the following nuance:

> There is no kind of being called 'spirit.' What there is, is Jones, Smith, and God, each of whom is in his own way self-transcendingly lively. The paradigmatic uses of 'spirit' are and must remain those in phrases with the pattern 'the spirit of . . . .' There is 'the spirit of Lincoln' or 'the spirit of St. Luke's Congregation' or 'the Spirit of God.' Spirit is precisely the person or group as not immediately identical with itself; the genitive phrase marks the nonidentity.[76]

This genitive pattern is common in biblical usage of the Holy Spirit, but Jenson is also thinking of later theological and philosophical refinement of the definition of 'person', when he claims to be describing what Spirit is.[77] The Spirit, as the spirit of Jesus' and the Father's interaction, is the power "who inhabits our future."[78] This 'biblical' understanding of the Holy Spirit is applied to the question of religious pluralism in this way: "If God has history and is Lord from the future, our appropriate policy to the other

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[75]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 23-24.

[76]Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, II.107. Jenson can locate biblical attributions of personality to the Spirit as the result of "shamanistic acts" which were imposed on the Spirit in certain sections of the early church, ibid., 116.

[77]*The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Personal Identity," by A. C. Danto.

[78]Jenson, "The Christian Doctrine of God," in *Keeping the Faith*, 40.

religions can be very simple: we should assert Jesus' resurrection and trust the Spirit."[79] In other words, what the Christian means when referring to the Spirit's particular role and identity, is parallel to, perhaps even synonymous with, such a sentiment as "trust in the future for everything to work out." That is what faith in God is all about.

Because Jenson's discussion of the identity of the Spirit according to the biblical record focuses only on the Spirit as power,[80] there is a striking equivalence between the common concept of spirit, and 'Spirit' as applied to God: "Not only in Christian theology, the notion of spirit is a crossing place of anthropology, theology, and even cosmology."[81] All three areas reduce their concept of spirit to the same idea. That does not mean that the Spirit is the same as humanity's spirit: "The mode of this Spirit's presence to other spirits is always that of Creator to creatures."[82] Why this is so, Jenson does not explain.

Conclusion

As developed by Jenson, the individual components of the divine name 'Father, Son, Spirit,' can be explained biblically.[83] Specifically, the triune name gives the answer to humanity's question of how time is to be bracketed by eternity (God). By affirming the incarnation of God in time through Jesus, the basis for understanding God's eternity is

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[79]Ibid., 50.

[80]Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, II.109-119, is where he exegetes the relevant references to Spirit in the Bible.

[81]Ibid., 106.

[82]Ibid., 107.

made concrete. To explain how this is so, Jenson employs the slogan of God's *love* to explain Jesus' life. The life of Jesus was an unconditional love which was willing to face death for his lover (humanity), "rather than qualify his self-giving to others." Further, his love is a "successful love" because through the resurrection, he continues to be present to his lover (unsuccessful love would become final and end in death). In a finite world, where time ends in death, true love must "finally *mean* death and resurrection." The limit of human love is thus transcended, and Jesus' love is seen to embrace all persons with a "communal freedom established in the history so fulfilled." Jesus is the openness of the future, and as a human is the hope that life is not defined simply by the past. "'God' is an appropriate word for the reality identifiable as what happened with Jesus."[84] As already discussed, the Spirit is the power of the future, as he is defined as Jesus' Spirit. The love of Jesus is humanity's hope in the face of death and temporal finiteness. The Spirit is the content of that hope, springing from the Son and Father's liveliness.[85] The transcendence "given to [Jesus'] acts and sufferings, the Transcendence *over against* whom he lives and to whom he is responsible" is the Father.

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[83]E.g., Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 10-13.

[84]Ibid., 22-23. In the Old Testament, God's eternity was often described as faithfulness. For an analysis of faithfulness similar to that just applied to love, see Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, I.102-05, 170 f.

[85]In his chapter "The Christian Doctrine of God," in *Keeping the Faith*, 28, Jenson provides a succinct definition of religion: "Religion is the cultivation of eternity, of whatever it is thought to be that brackets past and future . . . . And if the eternity we intend can plausibly be addressed, if prayer is possible, we worship a God or pantheon." For similar, but less academic description of the nature of religion, see Jenson, "The God Question," 46-50.

This christocentric description of the nature of the Trinity using the biblical term, 'love,' also gives God's temporal identification of 'givenness', 'present possibility', and 'outcome' of Jesus' work. God embraces all three points of time. Thus, time is not "mitigated" but given liveliness through God. The biblical identification of God as Trinity is also the identification of the three points of time.[86] In this way, Jenson posits that the components of the proper name of God are identities which correspond to the course of universal history (which God's deity is dependent on).[87] Jenson affirms Rahner's Rule that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity," but interprets it so that the immanent Trinity can only be the future reality of God in the eschaton.[88] The identities, except for Jesus, are not personal, except as far as they can be identical with the one personal subject of God, who receives this personality from the historical Jesus.

If the Father and the Spirit are impersonal, yet are identities which constitute the personal subject called 'God', then there can be personal attributes made of them, insofar as they manifest the one subject. Because the three identities are the common activity which constitutes the being of God, they reflect that being. However, it should be evident, now, that while the one common action of the three is God's being, the personal and self-willing person of Jesus is how the dialectical derivation of 'person' is achieved in the one

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[86]Ibid., 23-25.

[87]H. Blocher, "Immanence and Transcendence in Trinitarian Theology," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. K. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 114.

God. The Father and the Spirit are personal only as God is 'person'. God is personal because Jesus is 'person'.

While this may seem paradoxical, since Jenson talks of God's activity in the Old Testament, prior to the birth of Jesus, he sees the pre-existent Christ as unknowable and not deducible.[89] While God's transcendent freedom means that God could exist even if he had not created the universe as it is, that is all that can be said. Because the universe as it is and as it will be, including Jesus' existence, are the only facts that are always at hand, then theologians can only understand God's present and future.[90]

Jenson's understanding of the one being of God (the event of future liveliness) in three identities is a revision of Barth's uni-personal God in three modes. Just as Barth has been criticised for such an interpretation of God, so criticisms have been raised of Jenson's concept of Trinity. These criticisms of his understanding of the *hypostases* of God are the next items to be addressed.

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[88]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 139-40. Rahner's statement of this axiom was posed in 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise "De Trinitate"', in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, trans. K. Smith (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd; The Seabury Press, 1966), 87.

[89]Ibid., 139-142.

[90]Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITIQUES OF JENSON'S TRIUNE IDENTITIES

The response to Jenson's revision of the concept of the Trinity has been fairly broad. Most new books that have addressed the doctrine of the Trinity in the past few years have attempted to deal with at least some of his ideas, usually concerning the nature of time and God's temporal infinity. However, a few authors have directly addressed him at other key points, including his concept of 'person'. The two main responses have been from Wolfhart Pannenberg and Colin Gunton. As well, Robert John Russell has written about Jenson's concept of time from the perspective of science, and specifically relativity and quantum theories of time. He has sought to show how Jenson's proposal concerning God's temporality has had certain major effects upon the concept of the 'persons' of the Trinity.

The following critique will proceed by subject area, first dealing with Jenson's use of biblical and historical sources for his theological system; second, dealing with the concept of person and identity (including problems arising from Jenson's concepts, including the denial of the preexistent Christ); and third, narrowing the focus to Jenson's understanding of the Holy Spirit as an example of how his use of 'identity' deals with the biblical picture of Spirit.

Biblical Interpretation

Method is always a crucial factor in examining any theologian's system. A person's theology will be shaped by his use of biblical and historical sources according to how one seeks to understand and appropriate the traditions of the church's belief and the scriptures. The use of the Bible in Jenson's trinitarian theology will be thoroughly addressed throughout this chapter, since it is germane to each of the subject areas. In anticipation of the specific criticisms, two points about the critiques should be noted.

First, like Jenson's historical method, he prefers a narrative interpretation of scripture. One of the values of such an approach is that it places a positive emphasis upon the place of the biblical text in the community of faith. Christian theology, among other things, builds upon a biblical foundation. This is further strengthened by Jenson's commitment to the self-revelation of God in history, with the Incarnation as the central event for the church (one of Jenson's favourite sayings is that "the Bible is not about God, it is the story of God"[1]). However, a narrative interpretation has drawbacks as well. In Jenson's case, details are sometimes sacrificed for the broader narrative interpretation. This criticism was already raised in chapter three in respect to historical interpretation in general[2] While not shying away from historical-critical methods, Jenson tends to utilise them less than "spiritual interpretations" which are sometimes more effectively Idealistic in

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[1]See this thesis, p. 43, n. 44.

[2]The earlier discussion is found on pages 35-38.

origin. This seems ironic when the emphasis on God's revelation in history would seem to require that attention to detail, such as the section on the Holy Spirit will address, rather than generalisations. Jenson has set out specific hermeneutical principles and goals, but often contradicts them in practice.[3]

The second point to note about this evaluation of Jenson's biblical criticism and the subsequent critiques is that the author assumes that the place of scripture in Christian theology is fundamental. Since the scriptures have been canonised by the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then a foundational role in doctrinal development is played by them. Again, a healthy respect for the details which scripture gives when developing a doctrine of God, in balance with the "spiritual reading" of scripture, ought to be the rule. This means that all of the canon has to be scrutinised for what it tells us about the story of God (examples are found throughout the chapter). The use of scripture by Jenson is often insightful and helpful. What seems to be missing is consistency. Of course, no hermeneutical system is without reproach, and so alternative suggestions offered here are done so with humility.[4]

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[3]I have dealt with this series of observations and criticisms elsewhere, and refer the reader to that work. The bibliographical details were given earlier, p. 4, n. 7.

[4]My own hermeneutical method is similar to that espoused in the essay by J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*, eds. D. A. Carson and J. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 325-358.

Historical Interpretation

The previous chapter pointed to the fact that Jenson prefers the Cappadocian contributions to classic trinitarian theology to any Western contributions. His concerns about the lack of any centrality of trinitarian theology in the Western tradition, including the Enlightenment rejection of the Trinity as unnecessary to doing theology at all, in conjunction with the clearly trinitarian foundations of the Orthodox tradition, provide a basis for using the latter to justify his ontological revisions of trinitarian thinking. The primary revision—interpreting God as temporally infinite—is set against Augustine's belief in a timeless deity. Accordingly, for Jenson, the concept of timelessness is part of the Hellenistic philosophical tradition, which means that through Augustine the West has become a slave to philosophical theism, rather than Christian theology. Gregory of Nyssa, however, represents the biblical understanding of God acting in time, and as having time.

The focus of this thesis is on Jenson's concept of 'person' and God, and therefore a thorough examination and critique of Jenson's claims to ground his understanding of a temporal God in the Cappadocian theology (a thesis in itself) would be out of place in this context. It must be said that his specific interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa is not without problems (and conversely, so are his sweeping generalisations about Augustine and Western theology as being theologically inferior to the Cappadocians). Moreover, since his idea of time forms a pivotal support for the rest of his trinitarian theology, the problems which are exposed therein will have ramifications for all other points of his

work. To that end, a brief examination of Gregory of Nyssa must be undertaken to see if he really did provide the first hints of seeing temporality in God.

This may be done in two steps. First, the primary passage which Jenson uses in *The Triune Identity* to establish his interpretation of Gregory can be considered by itself, to determine whether he has really deduced its meaning. Second, the interpretations of Patristic scholars can be searched to see what the traditional reading of Gregory has been.

The passage which Jenson uses to bolster his understanding of God's being is a polemical passage of Gregory against the Arians:

> Moreover, as Gregory's language of life and motion already shows, it is by time's proper reality as futurity that he interprets God's infinity. Explicitly, "the identifying mark of the divine life . . . is that always God must be said to be: 'He was not . . .' or 'He will not be . . . never fit him. . . . We teach . . . what we have heard from the prophets . . . , that he is king before all ages and will rule through all ages. . . . So we must ask [the Arians] why they define God's being by its having no beginning and not by its having no end. . . . Indeed, if they must divide eternity, let then reverse their doctrine and reckon endless futurity the mark of deity . . . , finding their axioms in what is to come and is real in hope, rather than in what is past and old." Note also that Gregory does *not* say, as Augustine: "'He was' or 'He will be' never fit God.[5]

Jenson interprets this passage to be saying: "To be God is . . . always to have future."[6] God is infinite because he is perfect freedom and action. Since time is a metaphysical fact, and the Bible clearly shows the three identities interacting in time (the Father by the resurrection of the Son, and thus giving their Spirit to the finite creation as endless

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[5]R. W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 165-66. A portion of this passage was quoted in the previous chapter. This is the complete synopsis of Gregory's discussion about time by Jenson.

[6]Ibid.

possibility), then the conclusion to be drawn is that Gregory was heading toward temporal infinity.

Duane Larson summarises Jenson's ideas in this way:

> In sum, Jenson ups the ante. God does not have a future. God *is* the future. What Jenson supposes Gregory and himself to mean by divine infinity is that which always *is* future, which embraces and moves all temporality, and is never exhausted by it. . . . It is the 'object' of our hope, God the power of the future, who by entering into relationship with the creation thereby creates temporality.[7]

This involves the trinitarian identities, because they are the subsistent relations whose interaction, which Jenson identifies as Spirit, produces future. The trinitarian relationships are the way that the one subject, God, relates to the creation. That relation of the three identities is experienced as time from the perspective of the creature, who sees God as the "object" of hope.

The immediate quotation which Jenson gives stands on its own, since it has been carefully put together from a long section in Gregory's writing.[8] He obviously perceives it to convey not only what Gregory intended, but also what he intends in his own theology. However, does the possibility of a temporally alive God really come through this quotation? The answer would seem to be negative. Gregory is referring not so much to

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[7]D. H. Larson, *Times of the Trinity: A Proposal for Theistic Cosmology*, Worcester Polytechnic Institute Studies in Science, Technology, and Culture, eds. L. Schachterle and F. C. Lutz, vol. 17 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 48-49.

[8]The quotation from Gregory ranges over several pages of the section on God's eternity, piecing together the substance of the argument, at least to Jenson's satisfaction. The context for this patchwork can be found in Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V., trans. P. Schaff and H. Wace (New York: Christian Literature, 1893), 97-100.

God's temporality, as to the Arians' fixation on trying to explain everything about the Trinity and Incarnation from the point of view of the Father as the beginning and source of Godhead. Gregory is challenging their limited concept of eternity as proceeding from the past alone. He calls them not to "divide eternity" by the past only, which does not allow complete justice to God's eternal nature.

To call them to look at the futurity of God is to point to the prophetic eschatological message which scripture brings. This is a rhetorical move which challenges limited assumptions. To find a hint of teaching about the temporality of God would be to read too much into Gregory's argument. It is true that he does use the language of time to talk about God's actions, and he does not, like Augustine, go so far as to say that God has no past or future. He does not go that far because he is challenging the problems of mixing God's eternity and absolute beginning together in a Platonic mixture. God's temporality or timelessness is not the issue for Gregory, rather he is attempting to give balance to the human effort to talk about an eternal God, which, in Arian thought, was limited to one direction—the past.

By apparently aligning himself with Gregory regarding the doctrine of God, Jenson would claim a certain prestige of association with the Church Fathers. However, the problem that looms behind any interpretation of a historical figure is that the interpreters may not really understand the person they are studying. In this case, Jenson's claim that Gregory of Nyssa was advocating a non-Hellenistic understanding of God, especially as regards his timelessness, would seem to succumb to this criticism. As was shown earlier,

Jenson subscribes to the popular view that the Western church was committed, via Augustine, to a heavily Platonic interpretation of God, which included God's timelessness. One of the advantages of the Eastern church was that it overcame this reliance through the trinitarian debates, and especially through the Cappadocians, who rejected the timeless, Platonic deity. Therefore, accepting this assumption, Jenson searches the Eastern Fathers for a God who is not timeless. He does find the object of his search, but at the expense of proper research into the intention of the authors.[9]

When one examines Gregory of Nyssa's exact beliefs about time and eternity, in regard to the doctrine of God, it turns out that he was more influenced by the Neo-Platonic tradition than Jenson seems to realise. This may be deduced by the way that Gregory talks of time as consisting of stages which progress toward God, though never reaching him. This is a form of thinking known as the ascent of the soul, which Neo-Platonists used to explain how the person can know God.[10] The pursuit of God, which Jenson interprets as God's being—eternity—always racing faster than time, so that time-creation cannot keep up with God,[11] is in fact the subjective apprehension of God by creatures in time. "But *in eternity* we *objectively* will enjoy perfected, unextended

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[9]Pannenberg also has similar doubts about Jenson's discovery of such positive results in the East, and his rejection of the Western tradition: *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), I.323.

[10]A. A. Mosshammer, "Historical Time and the *Apokastasis* According to Gregory of Nyssa," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 27, ed. E. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993),70-93. Also helpful is "C. G. Stead, *Substance and Illusion in the Christian Fathers* (London: Variorum, 1985), which has detailed explanations of Gregory's terminology and how it is used in ontological discussions.

extension or an instantaneously self-satisfying desire which answers approximately to the Platonic, timeless 'motionless motion' that is always at the 'place' to which it is 'going'."[12] The pursuit of God and his own relationship to the creation is described in spatially and temporally extended terms, so that discourse can take place. The fact that God's timelessness[13] is not able to be grasped means that creatures must talk about God in creaturely terms. The sense that God is always racing ahead of time has nothing to do with God's being ontologically future, but rather with the link between God and his creation through the language that is part of the stages of ascent toward God in time and space (specifically toward transcendent time, which is just before eternity).[14]

The timeless God which Gregory of Nyssa accepted, is not the temporally infinite God which Jenson sees in the *Contra Eunomian*. Both Patristic scholarship and the passage which Jenson cites seem to be concerned not with an ontology of God, but with the description of God according to christianised Neo-Platonic language. The idea of time fits into a cosmology which sees time as part of the creation. The orientation, then, is not ontological but epistemological. It is not easy to follow the complex arguments of Gregory, especially when the Hellenistic philosophical terminology is subtle and easily

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[11]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 165 f.

[12]P. Plass, "Transcendent Time and Eternity in Gregory of Nyssa," *Vigilae Christianae* 34 (1980): 183. This is supported by the classic study by B. Otis, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Concept of Time," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 14, ed. E. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1976), 327-357.

[13]J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 111.

[14]Plass, "Transcendent Time," 183.

misunderstood without a strong grounding in later Neo-Platonism. It seems that Jenson has likely read his own theory of God's infinite temporality into his historical research.

At the same time, it has also been seen that Jenson affirms that God created time.[15] Jenson does not reconcile this ambiguity. It may be that God's infinite temporality does not pose any problems with the creation of time, since created time is finite. If this is the case, then God's infinity remains intact, while the fragmented nature of finite time can be created, with the two united in the experience of the temporal God who is the power of the future—that is, as Spirit. However, such a theory is not representative of Gregory's position, and therefore, he cannot be relied upon for support. An associational, or suggestive, reading of Gregory's argumentation might provide an apparent linguistic hint from which to conceive other possibilities, but this is hardly historical research.[16]

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[15]R. W. Jenson, "The Logic of the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Dialog* 26, no. 4 (1987): 249.

[16]Whatever Jenson's response to such criticism, he seems to have realised that his views are not compatible with Gregory of Nyssa. Through his dialogue with Pannenberg, he now distances himself from his Cappadocian interpretations:

> Or one might correlate imaginary time to that sheer *infinity*-as-such that in Cappadocian trinitarianism gives the life that is God its character as the life that is *God*. Someone who did would take Wolfhart Pannenberg's side of an argument he and I have been conducting. For it is precisely the infinity of imaginary time, that it lacks the arrow which for experience qualifies time as time. I have claimed that also God's infinity must be understood as a 'temporal' infinity, using 'temporal' in its 'real' sense; and that Pannenberg's understanding of God's infinity as God's bottom-line timelessness is a lapse ("Does God Have Time? The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Concept of Time in the Physical Sciences," *CTNS Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (1991): 5).

This passage reveals a new awareness of the timeless God which the Cappadocians held to, even though they used analogical and apophatic language to talk about God, thus bringing him into the realm of creation. Pannenberg's criticism's of Jenson's use of historical theology are scattered throughout *Systematic Theology*, I.278, 323, 385.

A Critique of Person in Jenson's Theology

The central issue of this thesis is Jenson's concept of 'person' and how it relates to the three *hypostases*. His contention that the Trinitarian God is a God of subsistent relations (appropriating the Cappadocian terminology) is one of the first instances of such an argument in Protestant theology in this century, following Barth's example. As quoted in the previous chapter, Jenson asserts that those relations are what constitute God's personal identity. "The 'a person' that God is, is the human person Jesus, the Son. The triune event that God is, is by its triunity a person, this one. We need not think of the other identities, of the Father or the Spirit, as, with respect to their distinction from one another, individual personal beings in the modern sense."[17] The person Jesus is the object of God. God, the subject, "achieves itself as the *process* . . . of rediscovering ['finding meaning in'] itself in the object . . . . This reconciliation of reason-as-subject with object-made-reasonable, is living reason, spirit."[18] This clearly goes against the current stream of opinion in systematic theology, described in the second chapter, which holds to a personalist understanding of persons, rather than a psychological one, and thus affirms the personal nature of each of the *hypostases*.

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[17]C. E. Braaten, and R. W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), I.170-71. The discussion of this passage is in found in the previous chapter of this thesis, 53 f.

[18]Ibid., 152 f.

Pannenberg is a personalist theologian, and also one of the leading debaters with Jenson (along with Colin Gunton). He has brought criticism against Jenson's impersonal hypostases which constitute a personal God. In "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God" he argues his point in this manner: "Jenson continued to hold to the conception of the triune God as a single Subject, thinking of the Trinity in terms of its self-unfolding. He was apparently unaware of the criticism levelled by Moltmann and me against this conception . . . ."[19] Pannenberg's contention is that if God is constituted by relations, then it seems that there should be more than one person (Jesus) in order to talk about relations which make up a personal God. Relationships of impersonal identities with one personal being seems an unlikely model adequately to describe the personal event called God.[20]

Pannenberg's concept of 'person' is based on an exegesis of the trinitarian relationships as found in the New Testament (and prefigured in the Old Testament). He sees the mutual personal relations of the three persons to be spelled out in the context of the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom. This of course departs from the traditional theological discussion of the relations of origin based on their names, which Pannenberg rejects because it does not allow for truly mutual relationships or do justice to the Holy Spirit. In essence, his understanding of the relationships is that the Father hands over the Kingdom to the Son, who in turn gives it back to the Father as the completion of his mission of salvation. The Father is thus mutually dependent upon the Son and Spirit in

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[19]W. Pannenberg, "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God," *Dialog* 26, no. 4 (1987): 252.

their work to bring the Kingdom to fulfilment. Thus the Father's monarchy is one of personal relationship, not ontology. The Son is son precisely because of his obedience and submission to the Father, which is the proof of that sonship, in creaturely terms. The same type of submission is displayed by the Spirit in that he does not focus on himself, but rather on glorifying the Son and Father. His work is that which glorifies them. All of this surrounds the establishment and final fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, which was the substance of Jesus' message. Therefore, by simple mathematics, it would be wrong also to talk about the one personal God, since that would involve yet another person who is God. Therefore, God's unity, or essence, is impersonal, being the constitution of the three personal relationships. The one God is called personal only in the way that the one essence of God is shown through each of the three. This conforms to the idea of God being the event of three persons.[21]

When Pannenberg brought his criticism against Jenson, he was not concerned with pointing out the possibility of four Gods. Rather, his concern was directed toward the problem of modalism. Even though Jenson goes to great lengths to avoid using Barth's "modes of being," choosing instead "identities," the modalist threat stems from the idea of one personal subject, not the terminology of the three *hypostases*. The "self-unfolding" God, which Pannenberg criticises, is the God whose three identities are not constitutive of

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[20]Ibid., 253-254.

[21]Such a summary of Pannenberg's argument cannot be truly representative of the nuances which he has brought out in his 189-page exposition in *Systematic Theology*, I.259-448. However,

God as such, but the outworking of the one God. That is why the Father and Spirit can be impersonal in Jenson's system. As the psychological makeup of a single subject, they are not necessary as discrete personal subjects, but rather objects of God which indicate the possibility of "other" thus affirming God's personhood. The second and third chapters linked this directly to Hegel's understanding of person in response to Fichte.

God's personal self-consciousness, in the Hegelian system, is achieved by the experience of himself as other, embodied in Jesus. Thus Jesus gives the personhood of God to God, not to the Father or the Spirit. They function simply as the poles of mediation which Jesus brings together. This means that God's "self-unfolding" is not that of three persons constituting a unity, but of one unity seen in three modes or identities. Their constitutive force is one of inner dynamics which are visible in creation because of the temporal nature of God, which corresponds with the analogous temporal nature of creation. Ted Peters sums up the complaint against Jenson: "[He] returns us to the classical God of monotheism who is in-and-for-himself and even self-related apart from any external relations."[22] This is modalism, where the external relations are only indicative

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it suffices to reveal the thinking which he has in mind when he conceives of mutual relationships between three self-conscious agents.

[22]T. Peters, "Trinity Talk: Part II," *Dialog* 26, no. 4 (1987): 135. Peters is not happy with this modalist option because it short-circuits the development of a panentheistic theology, which Peters tends to lean toward. This shift away from the more radical step toward process theology makes for an often confusing and ambiguous argument, which C. S. Anderson tries to account for in "Jenson's Trinitarian Metaphysics" (M.A. Thesis, Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity, 1993).

of an inner process which constitutes personhood without the relational qualities of the persons of the Godhead which are developed biblically.

Subordinationism is also a threat since the self-developing God must still be understood within the context of temporality, which places the Father at the beginning, and the roles of Jesus and the Spirit as the self-fulfilment of the Father.[23] The Son is the object of the Father's love, and the Spirit the outcome. The Father must have a priority that creates a distance or inequality with respect to the other two. This is a problem of defining the subsistent relations as proceeding from the Father, rather than stressing the ontological mutuality of the relations, and relative subordination of the roles in the *ad extra* economy of action.

The Problem of Denying the *Logos Asarkos*

This charge of modalism is supplemented by the insistence of Jenson that there is no *logos asarkos*, which would indicate timelessness and hence must be avoided. Jenson sees any sustained emphasis on the "past" or "persistent Beginning" of God to be destructive of God's temporal infinity, which is seen through the eschatological character of time. Yet, if the fleshless Christ cannot be a possibility, partly due to the implication of timelessness, and partly due to the need for an embodied self in which to see oneself (which is part of personhood), then this leaves a gaping void in the possibility of talking about God before Jesus. In *The Triune Identity*, after Jenson establishes the linguistic

[23]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 297-98.

patterns of the Old Testament which allow for talk of God (Father) and Spirit, he does not use the Old Testament in his discussion of the doctrine of God. He argues, following Barth, that the *logos asarkos* is not necessary and proceeds accordingly.[24]

This seems to neglect not only scriptural evidence that Christ existed before the Incarnation[25] but also the more important concern that Christ's preexistence grounds our understanding of the Trinity. Pannenberg takes up this concern when he argues that "The idea of preexistence of the Son of the eternal Father is crucial in the process of explication of the meaning inherent in Jesus' historical teaching and activity, if the trinitarian doctrine is to be considered the final result of that process of explication. Without the preexistent Son, who became incarnate in Jesus, there would be no trinitarian concept of God."[26] This is shaped further by Kasper, who shows that the language used by Jesus about the Father—*abba*—as well as his teaching of the involvement of the Father in his life, and the cross and resurrection, only make sense if preexistence was true of the Son.[27] The kenotic language of the other parts of the New Testament also point toward preexistence, in that the Incarnation was a sacrifice which the Son made for the kingdom of the Father.[28]

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[24]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 140 f.

[25]John 1:1-4 is the most obvious passage.

[26]W. Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God: The New Discussion on the Trinitarian Doctrine," *Asbury Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (1991):30-31.

[27]W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 174-177.

[28]Ibid.

In denying the preexistence of Christ, despite its biblical support, Jenson is trying to preserve the temporal infinity of God. Preexistence looks backward, in Jenson's opinion, and thus is not indicative of the nature of the Triune God, who is Spirit and therefore ontologically future. In order to maintain the temporally infinite God against the Hellenistic natural theology (timelessness) which has too long influenced the church , he is willing to jettison certain doctrines and ideas.

However, this causes an unexpected result for Jenson, which R. J. Russell brings out in his criticism of Jenson's concept of time. He questions whether Jenson's assumption that time is a metaphysical fact that must constitute God is really true.[29] This seems to be the same move that the "Hellenists" make when they assume timelessness, only in the opposite direction. "Thus my *methodological* issue is whether the three modes of time are *the basis, not just the domain of agency*, of the Triune God, and in particular of God's three-fold character."[30] Jenson has assumed his own methodological naturalism which he wants to avoid by rejecting Hellenistic naturalism.

This assumption, with its questionable foundations—both historically and methodologically—is not a safe rule for measuring other doctrines. Rather than oppose the *logos asarkos* because of it, the question of Christ's preexistence should criticise it as not true to the biblical concept of God who transcends time completely.

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[29]Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, I.101-102.

[30]R. J. Russell, "Is the Triune God the Basis for Physical Time?," *CTNS Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (1991): 9.

The same can be said for Jenson's concept of 'person'. It would seem that he is conditioning the understanding of the *hypostases* based on a need to keep them within the self-unfolding of a temporal God, whose future is ever in motion, and who is defined by temporal indicators of each *hypostasis*.[31] Because this is so, the *hypostases* must become metaphysical positions-in-relation to one another. Their contribution to the personhood of God is only through the life of Jesus. Because they are the inner movement of God, but worked out in the world, they are modes rather than subjects. This requirement of defining the *hypostases* according to the questionable metaphysical fact of the three points of time (and the coincidental correspondence of the triunity of God) does not adequately take into account the specific descriptions of the persons as they are revealed in scripture. Jenson consistently reverses the explication of history and doctrine by interpreting them through his theory, rather than testing his theory according to the tools of scripture, doctrine, and history.

The Example of the Holy Spirit

The previous two sections present generalised systematic criticisms of Jenson, which point out the internal flaws of his proposal and methods. The modalistic problem is one of consistency between a relational God and the possibility of such relationality from a strictly psychological ordering of personhood. Pannenberg's alternative model suggests that the personalistic understanding of person is more representative of the biblical

[31]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 167.

portrayal of God, and thus involves a degree of specificity in his critique of Jenson's use of scripture, by providing an alternative exegesis. This critique can be carried further by asking whether Jenson's understanding of the *hypostasis* of the Spirit is consistent with the biblical identification of the Holy Spirit. The principle source of this critique is Colin Gunton, who has studied under Jenson, and has written on his pneumatology.[32]

The problem of natural theology is raised by Gunton along the same lines that have just been mentioned, namely that Jenson assumes that certain natural "facts" must be integral to God in the same way that they are for humanity. In the case of the Holy Spirit this has to do with the definitions of 'spirit'. "There is no kind of being called 'spirit.' What there is, is Jones, Smith, and God, each of whom is in his own way self-transcendingly lively . . . . Spirit is precisely the person or group as not immediately identical with itself."[33] This definition marks the basis of Jenson's understanding both of person and of spirit. In terms of person, the identity of the Father is not immediately identical with itself in Jesus (who is embodied and self-conscious). In terms of the Spirit, there is no personality, but rather a mark of self-transcendence. In a temporal God, this self-transcendence is marked by the characteristic of ontological futurity: "It is specifically

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[32]C. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 122-141.

[33]Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, II.107. See also *Triune Identity*, 156 f. This quotation was also given in chapter three of this thesis, where its context was explained in more detail, 55 ff.

as the Spirit that God comes to us from the unsurpassable future, that he is the Power of the Eschaton."[34]

As Gunton points out, this concept of spirit (and person) is "dangerously near a Hegelian conception of self-realisation through the other."[35] This raises the problem that Jenson is utilising a "natural theological projection" of a "supposed meaning " of 'spirit'. By doing so, he then reads back into the biblical text and into theology a foreign conception of spirit.[36] Again, such methodology is backwards to the most constructive goals of theology, since it fails to integrate the results of specifically Christian research into the wider spectrum of learning, but instead reverses the process, which threatens to rob the unique contributions of Christian theology by predetermining them according to foreign thought structures (which Jenson accused the Church Fathers of doing in their doctrine of God and time).

This incorporation of a naturalistic interpretation of spirit also causes the deeper problem of two negative consequences which are then introduced into the final interpretation of Spirit. First, the idea of spirit as self-transcendence, and specifically as Future, is only an abstraction; this is to confuse a gift of the Spirit ("genuine freedom") with the giver. The Spirit is more than an abstraction, and more than Jesus' spirit.[37] Schott adds the warning that by making the Spirit an outcome of Jesus and the Father, one

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[34]Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 169.

[35]Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 135.

[36]Ibid.

might question whether "it is used as a purely logical device to establish the unsurpassability of the Father-Son relationship; in that case, it would be a metaphysical affirmation of a dialectical duality rather than a Trinity."[38] On the other hand, a biblical interpretation of Spirit takes into account the person who is sent to the people to revive them and lead them into eternity, rather than simply a logical principle. The use of the biblical presentation of Spirit is lacking in Jenson's account.

Second, by making the Spirit simply the spirit of the Father's and Son's liveliness, pneumatological subordination becomes apparent.[39] This charge is somewhat mitigated by Jenson's insistence that the Future has ultimate priority, which seems to take the implied subordination of the Spirit as the outcome of Jesus' life, and make it not the final production of a relationship between two identities, but instead as the governing force of God. Unfortunately this move is also problematic, as Schott sees this perspective forcing a subordinationist understanding of the trinitarian relationships, since "the action of Jesus and his Father can only be unsurpassable on the metaphysical condition of the inexhaustibility of the future."[40] Again, the naturalistic assumption dictates a role for Spirit based on temporality, which leads to an interpretation of Spirit without the priority

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[37]Ibid., 136.

[38]F. Schott, "God Is Love: The Contemporary Theological Movement of Interpreting the Trinity as God's Relational Being" (Th.D. Diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1990), 296.

[39]Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 135.

[40]F. Schott, "God Is Love," 297. The contradiction of this priority of the inexhaustible future with the assertion that "the act of Father, Son, and Spirit overcomes all conditions" (Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 166) is also pointed out by Schott.

of the Christian scripture, but rather by reading into scripture metaphysical assumptions, with a resultant outcome opposite to the biblical presentation.

Gunton's criticisms centre around the problem of ascribing to the definition of 'Spirit' an abstract and naturalistic concept of 'spirit'. These criticisms are further strengthened by the problematic insistence of Jenson that temporality must be the basis for understanding 'God'. Yet, even though Gunton suggests an alternate understanding of Spirit, following the personalist understanding of the Spirit's personhood, he does not elaborate the signs which mark the Spirit as a person (a personal and conscious agent who is able to be in personal relationship with others). He does, however, suggest that Jenson ought to take the specific biblical picture of the Spirit into account. It will be helpful to provide a brief basis for why it is possible to challenge Jenson's concept of Spirit as not being true to biblical revelation.

The general concerns about the lack of particularity and the impersonality of the Spirit have been justified by Jenson, in that the references to personality which scripture describes are "shamanistic."[41] Presumably he is referring to the coming of the Spirit on individuals in the same way that various religions use the powers of a medium to get in contact with the divine. This would thus portray the Spirit personally through another person. The context of the discussion seems to use "shamanistic" with a negative connotation. However, he cites no evidence that any passages in the New Testament which attribute personality to the Spirit are negatively different from the rest of the

[41]Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, II.116.

scriptural presentation of the Spirit, and so it is hard to comment on this argument from silence. This move allows him to conceive of the Spirit in impersonal terms which are suitable for a metaphysical concept.

One of the foundational points which has shaped trinitarian theology since the time of Basil of Caesarea has been that the Spirit is also God in the sense that Jesus and the Father are God.[42] This tradition includes the awareness that the Spirit is portrayed with personal agency in the Bible. For example, in Acts 11:12, it is reported that the Holy Spirit told Peter to go with certain men. Again, in Acts 21:4, Luke attributes the message to leave the area to the Holy Spirit.[43] In Mark 13:11, Jesus comforts the disciples by assuring them that they do not have to speak, for the Holy Spirit will speak for them. These clearly attribute personal agency to the Spirit. Likewise, in John 14:16 ff., Jesus' promise is of a *paraclete*, someone who will intercede on behalf of people.[44]

The importance of this personal relationship between believers and God the Spirit is one of the keys to understanding salvation. J. Webster lists three important

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[42]Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. D. Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 17-18, and following. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper/SanFrancisco, 1991), 117-122, gives a good description of the themes of this little book, and their importance in theology. The main point is that the Cappadocians, in response to Arianism, instead of praying "to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit," stressed the co-equality of both the Son and the Spirit with the formula "to the Father, with the Son and the Holy Spirit."

[43]A. C. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 200 f., points out that of the sixty-two references to the Spirit in Acts, eighteen of them use terms that indicate "he is a person, who speaks, forbids, thinks good, appoints, sends, bears witness, snatches, prevents, is deceived, tempted, and resisted." Similar characterisations are found in Paul. Cf. A. Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

soteriological characteristics of the Spirit, all of which play a role in seeing the Spirit as an agent. First, the possibility of salvation rests upon a relationally oriented God. The Spirit is not the monadic God who is closed off from all creation, but is the sign of God's life which is open to humanity.[45] Second, the Spirit is involved in the continuation of the salvific plan. Salvation does not begin and end with Christ, since it is the Father who sends the Son, and the Spirit who enables the mission of the church, and the sanctification of believers.[46] Third, the worship of the church is dependent upon the Holy Spirit, who is the voice of God speaking through the people (e.g. Romans 8).[47] This does not exhaust the pneumatology of the New Testament, but is meant to highlight the witness to the personhood of the Spirit. He is not simply an impersonal identity, but is an agent who works in complete harmony with the Father and Son.

The dogmatic tradition has also explained how the Holy Spirit, whose name is not immediately indicative of the fact, is a person. His role in the economy of salvation

> is not to make himself known, but to manifest the love of God the Father and Jesus as Son. Equally, the Spirit, by dwelling in us and transforming us into sons and daughters, inserts us into the life of the Trinity where the Father becomes our Father and we, in turn, cry out with the Son, *Abba*![48]

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[44]Ibid., 201-204.

[45]J. Webster, "The Identity of the Holy Spirit: A Problem of Trinitarian Theology," *Themelios* 9, no. 1 (1983): 6.

[46]Ibid., 7.

[47]Ibid.

[48]T. G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 85.

His lack of distinct name actually distinguishes him as a person in whom the Father and the Son are named. The subsistent relations of the Father and Son are only as the Spirit is present in their relationships to one another. He "imparts their names."[49] It is through his relationship with them that they are related to one another. "It could even be said that the Holy Spirit is the most personal of the trinitarian persons . . . because he is the most translucent and transparent."[50] The personalist understanding of subsistent relations (rather than the traditional 'relations of origin'), including the Spirit, highlights the relationality of a personal God as the scripture conceives him more effectively than the psychological subsistent relations which are derived from the one subject called God, whose three identities are the self-unfolding of God's subjectivity as they move forward in time through Hegelian dialectics.[51]

Conclusion

The biblical presentation of the identities of Father, Son, and Spirit as personal agents is unaccounted for by Jenson, and this undermines his ability to develop a full-orbed trinitarian theology. By positing two impersonal identities which are part of the

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[49]Ibid., 84.

[50]Ibid.

[51]This discussion of the particularity of the personal Holy Spirit is an example of how Jenson has underestimated the importance of the agency of the Spirit in his trinitarian system. The same case could be made for the personal agency of the Father, both biblically and dogmatically. However, space does not permit this. Discussions which highlight the personal nature of the Father are helpfully put forward in Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 133-146; and T. F. Torrance, *The*

self-unfolding of a personal God—who somehow receives his personality from the bodily encounter of himself in the historical Jesus—Jenson hopes to preserve the belief that Christianity is monotheistic, on the one hand, and trinitarian on the other. He succeeds inasmuch as the self-identity of the one God is found through the threefold revelation of the identities according to the inescapable temporal process of his ec-centric[52] being.

The critics of Jenson have maintained, against this reasoning, that a more biblically accurate model of each *hypostasis* would not ignore the details which reveal three personal and self-conscious agents, whose common activity is the one essence of God. The importance of particularity when dealing with the three persons and their place in the biblical narrative must be stressed as part of authentic Christian theology. The scholarly criticisms raised have not only provided alternative models, but also have grounded them on the particularity of each person in scripture.

Ultimately, the criticisms in this chapter reveal that Jenson's overriding concern to follow Barth's deconstruction of the Hellenistic influence on theology results in a dependence on equal-but-opposite assumptions about God and reality. In Jenson's theology, the factor which shapes all theological discourse and concepts is that of time and eternity. This is so influential that Jenson has reread history to find his own theories in the writings of the Early church. His concept of God is also defined by the temporal nature of

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Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 55-59, 137-141, and 155-167.

[52]Pannenberg, *Systematic Being*, 113 and 155. It is part of the psychological idea of self-transcendence and openness to the world.

all reality, seeing God as ontologically future, which is how he defines Spirit (and spirit). The assumption (shared with Barth) that God is one subject, means that the three identities must be the outworking of the one personal God. Therefore, he can call two of them impersonal. Again, this guides his use of scripture, and is not necessarily justified by scripture's description of God. These problems are summed up well by Henry Chadwick, writing a response to similar problems in Jenson's christology: He frequently "puts the cart before the horse."[53]

[53]H. Chadwick, "An Anglican Response," in *In Search of Christian Unity*, ed. J. Burgess (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991), 61.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Summary of Research

The goal of this thesis has been to examine Jenson's concept of God as a 'person' critically, and how he conceives the three *hypostases* as identities. Chapter one gave a snapshot view of the renewal of discussion concerning trinitarian theology in the twentieth century. It also introduced Robert W. Jenson, and the place he holds in the discussion as a contributor to the literature and dialogue on the Trinity.

Chapter two presented the basic debate about the concept of 'person' which has taken place within theology in this century. It was shown that the modern concept of 'person' as a self-conscious being, and its subsequent developments in the realm of psychology, were generally rejected for application to the three *hypostases* in theology, for fear that tritheism would result. There is an increasing trend to adopt an alternative definition of 'person', taken from the personalist school—which accepts many of the tenets of the psychological model, but not as the primary source for understanding 'person'. This latter theory may be introduced into trinitarian discussion by the idea of subsistent relations, which as a part of the terminology of the ancient church, assumed the personal constitution of the three *hypostases*.

In contemporary theology, the problem of trinitarian personhood was first addressed by Barth, who wanted to avoid the implications of tritheism which the modern concepts had made a threat. He opted for a non-personalist description of the three *hypostases*, calling them 'modes of being' and denying them personal self-consciousness, instead arguing that the self-conscious subject belonged only to the Godhead, who caused the three modes to be attributed personality. The personalist critique of Barth was presented which can also be applied to any variety of the Barthian form of conceiving of only one person. Rather than capitulate to the modern definition, the personalists prefer to make relationality the defining factor, which requires three persons, not one alone.

Barth's profound influence on Jenson became apparent in chapter three where Jenson's theory of personhood as it applies to God was presented, along with other parts of his trinitarian doctrine. It was shown how Jenson first argued for a threefold identification of God by applying techniques of linguistic analysis to the biblical text. The role of analytic philosophy has not been utilised extensively in much of systematic theology, especially biblical theology. Jenson's efforts are in fact seen as pioneering for trinitarian theology.[1] His linguistic analysis did not deal with God as a 'person', but simply showed the importance of each identity, and how they were interrelated to each other through a complex linguistic use of identifying descriptors. This whole area of analysis could be worked out in greater depth in his writings, and is one of Jenson's most

[1]A. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 263-264.

important contributions to trinitarian theology, though it is not discussed as much as his ontological revisions.

The concept of God as temporally infinite, with the *hypostases* forming the one subject (in the modern sense), was asserted by Jenson to be historically in-line with the eastern church's early tradition, and a biblically accurate picture of God. The implication was that Jesus is the only personal *hypostasis*, with the Father and Spirit being impersonal manifestations of the self-unfolding personhood of the one God. They are subsistent relations, inasmuch as they could be seen as real, external relations which form the personal nature of God. Ironically, this means that Jesus, because he is the bodily other in whom God encounters himself, gives God his personhood. Jenson openly borrowed this development from Barth via Hegel. The Holy Spirit in Jenson's theology was then examined to see exactly how Jenson understood the metaphysical basis for understanding the Spirit as an impersonal and ontologically future part of the one subject of God.

Chapter four dealt with criticisms of Jenson's trinitarian doctrine, focusing on the consequences of holding the One God to be the only subject in the Trinity, a theory which runs counter to the majority of theories over the last twenty years. Jenson's decision to ground his conception of God as temporally infinite was claimed to be historically part of the Cappadocian theology. This conclusion was challenged with alternative theories which show that Jenson's reading of the Cappadocians was possibly predetermined by his own assumptions about time and temporality, as well as a misreading of the technical Neo-Platonic terminology which was the foundation of Cappadocian theology. This not only

meant that Jenson's historical theology was in question, but that his use of time and God's temporality as a metaphysical assumption also were inappropriately formulated, mirroring the very natural theology which he wanted to avoid.

Then, following Pannenberg's criticisms, the specific attribution of personhood to the one God, with the *hypostases* forming the development of this personhood, were seen to result in a form of modalism, with hints of subordinationism and monarchianism. This was the result of trying to avoid the personal agency of the three. A personalistic reciprocal self-distinction based on detailed biblical exegesis is Pannenberg's alternative. Variations of this criticism were considered, with a resultant decision that not only was the inability to recognise the personhood of the three *hypostases* a problem for avoiding modalism, but that Jenson's lack of attention to the detail of scripture's presentation of each person and their relationships did not allow him to ground his theology adequately as well. He was too reliant upon Hegel and Barth, while not considering the lack of correspondence between their ideas about the three persons in the biblical text.

Also, a specific test of Jenson's theory was applied to his description of the Holy Spirit. It was seen that, again, by assuming a naturalistic definition of spirit, his reading of the biblical person called the Holy Spirit was one-sided. While the evidence for the personal agency of the Holy Spirit has been presented by many scholars, and is also seen to be the assumption of the main traditions in theological history, Jenson's preferred assumptions of God's temporality are more compatible with the impersonal 'spirit' that has been taken from Augustinian-Hegelian idealism. Like the reading of God's

temporality into the biblical and historical material in order to find it, the reading of a specific impersonal, psychological concept of spirit into the biblical presentation of the Spirit will yield the desired results, but only at the expense of calling into question the whole foundation of Jenson's system. Thus, chapter four has the appearance of attacking Jenson's theology, because his assumptions have such negative consequences for what he tries to achieve.

The problem which Jenson has run into with the use of 'person' in his trinitarian theology is that by locating the concept of 'person' only in the modern, or psychological, definition (self-consciousness, self-willing, agency, etc.), and applying this not to the three *hypostases*, but to the godhead, he has made the *hypostases* impersonal identities (which he fails to define adequately) which are the processes of the godhead. This is modalism. While Jenson has correctly seen the relational character of the identities, and stressed their external movement within creation, which seems to take the reader's attention away from the psychological role they play in constituting God's 'person', he falls prey to the problem of modalism by admitting that God is separate from his creation. Since God is not dependent upon the creation for his being, then the three identities which Jenson describes, are seen to actually be the self-unfolding of God's person. They form that 'person' by their interaction, and therefore are psychological processes after all.

If Jenson's definition of 'person' as it relates to God is modalistic, then there must be a flaw in his definition. The suggestion that he has not taken into account the personalist philosophies of such thinkers as Pannenberg, Zizioulas, and Macmurray,

indicates that Jenson has an incomplete idea of 'person' to begin with. If he were to integrate the idea that seeing persons (using the psychological definition) in relation is the starting point for identifying the true constitutive nature of 'person', then not only could he allow for the three *hypostases* to be identified as persons without fear of tritheism (because their individuality is logically preceded by their relations with each other), but the unity of the godhead through the triune relationship of three persons would omit the problem of modalism. This evaluation of Jenson's concept of 'person' and how it relates to God also contains the alternative solution then, by advocating a major role for personalistic philosophical theory in the theological concept of 'person'.

One other flaw in Jenson's consideration of the concept of 'person' in theology seriously undermines his task. By positing time (which he describes as the "three arrows" of past, present, and future) as a metaphysical fact that is not able to be challenged, he is forced to make time part of God's being. This is demonstrated by his definition of 'Spirit' as "ontologically future." Because time is a part of God, the self-unfolding of God mentioned above becomes necessary for God's being.[2] This flaw undermines his task because it is evidence that a form of natural theology is the organising principle of his system. Jenson rejects natural theology and claims that it destroys the validity of truly

[2]If this is so, and he is a single subject, then there can be no avoidance of the charge of modalism, because the *hypostases* must function as the defining modes of God's inner being (it must be remembered that they are not personal, except for the Son who is only experienced as personal in the economy of salvation).

Christian theology. Jenson has clearly contradicted himself, leaving his definition of person invalid before he even can define it.

Two issues have been left unaccounted for by this thesis. First, little mention has been made of Jenson's response to criticisms of his theology.[3] It was noted that he has distanced his own concept of time and God from a direct relationship with the Cappadocians. However, he has also shown hints that his concept of person is changing toward a personalist understanding. His article on God in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* explicitly talks of agency in the three persons, which he associates with Pannenberg's and his own theology. His book on ecumenical theology,[4] which was the beginning of his preoccupation with the unity of the church in the 1990s, also began to take account of Greek Orthodox writers, like Zizioulas and Nissiotis, who have explained both Cappadocian theology and Orthodox theology in general along the lines of personalist philosophy. Jenson seems to have regarded the dialogue in which Pannenberg and Gunton have engaged him as important enough even to begin to reconsider his own position. The references to such a change of position are not extensive, but brief and enigmatic. Until he publishes a final account of his theology, it will not be possible to evaluate his response to the criticisms which have been highlighted in this thesis. Until then the vague references in the articles and book will have to suffice as an indication that Jenson is aware of the problems with some of his ideas.

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[3]See page 72, n.16, above.

Second, the criticism of Jenson's idea of 'person' has only suggested an alternative, without providing a more substantial basis for proceeding with the concept of the three *hypostases* as 'persons'. The personalist school has made some important arguments for defining person, and seeing the concept of person as part of the *imago dei*, thus enabling a correspondence between God's personhood and creaturely personhood. However, the complexity and detail which are required to do this make it impossible to pursue the task in this thesis. It should also be noted that personalists represent a large spectrum of theories, and so it is even impossible to provide summaries of the various suggestions made by such diverse scholars as Pannenberg, LaCugna, Kasper, and Gunton.[5]

Suggestions for Further Research

While a detailed alternative theory cannot be offered in this thesis, three suggestions for further research, that arise from the criticisms of the previous chapter, can help to make the understanding of God's personhood more representative of the biblical revelation of the three persons.

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[4]Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[5]The preference for Pannenberg—given his careful and balanced approach to a biblical personalism—in this thesis is evident. Other articles and books address his ideas, and should be consulted for some of the possibilities and problems which his form of personalism entails. A starting point would be S. Grenz's survey and discussion of scholarly debate about Pannenberg's theology, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford, 1990). On his trinitarian theology, the most recent article which is of help is C. Schwöbel, "Rational Theology in Trinitarian Perspective: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematic Theology," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 47, (1996): 498-527.

First, more work needs to be done in the area of biblical theology to strengthen the hermeneutical basis for trinitarianism. Jenson's contribution to the whole linguistic identification of God in both the Old and New Testaments provides a new aspect of understanding the Bible and the God it seeks to proclaim. While such analysis will not reveal a Trinity in the later dogmatic sense, it will lend further credence to the complex revelation of God in history, which only makes sense using a trinitarian hermeneutic.[6] It would make sense as well that Old Testament theology, from a Christian perspective, has a trinitarian grounding, which should be incorporated into the findings. Systematic theology's role here would be to reflect on the nature of Jewish monotheism and how it was open to trinitarian interpretation.

Because biblical theology rests in between biblical studies and systematics, greater co-operation between the two fields should also be encouraged through reflection on the trinitarian basis of theology. In many ways, systematicians are often guilty of neglecting the results of biblical studies in their work. The most recent major book to deal

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[6]Looking through standard conservative New Testament theologies often reveals that little or no space is given to the trinitarian God. A Christian theology, which is by definition trinitarian, ought to be both methodologically and materially well-covered in trinitarian reflection. The problem of whether the early church's concerns, and especially contemporary concerns, are even present in scripture is not the issue here. What is the issue concerns how biblical theologians, especially in New Testament studies, could expand on the meaning of the revelation of God that is found in scripture both from a trinitarian hermeneutic and in support of one. Christian theology is trinitarian and therefore should be consciously dealt with in that manner. Representative examples of such texts which neglect trinitarian theology and were consulted in this thesis are D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981); J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1971); F. Stagg, *New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Broadman, 1962); and G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. D. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

specifically with the trinity in relation to the New Testament was published in the early 1960s.[7] Wainwright's book is a classic, but has numerous flaws in its methodology which should be corrected with a more detailed study. For example, because of the lack of instances which show a close proximity between the Father and the Son in the book of Hebrews, Wainwright concludes that it is actually contains a subordination of Son to Father and lacks a Spirit-awareness.[8] Yet perhaps it is not only the proximity of the names, or the direct reference to their divinity, which may yield a trinitarian conclusion, but also the roles that the usage of the names signifies. Jenson's approach does not supersede Wainwright in any sense, but can complement it with a broader palette to capture the nuances which the various biblical writers used to communicate God's identity. At the very least a new, critical study of the Trinity in the Bible is needed.[9]

Second, the definition of 'person' needs continued attention. It is unlikely that there will ever be consensus on such a question. However, there is a realisation that a personalist understanding of the constitution of a person may help to clarify many issues in theology. Since the majority of theologians are taking up some degree of this interpretation of 'person', it is likely that the assumptions of the personal nature which makes up not only creatures, but also the persons of the Godhead, will lead to an understanding of the ancient church's reflections that is not as heavily influenced by some

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[7]A. C. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962).

[8]Ibid., 189-191, 222, for example.

[9]And such a study, with all its detail, needs to be taken seriously by systematicians, so that the mistakes which have been pointed out in thesis are not as prevalent.

of the idealistic and psychological readings of that era. The connection between creator and creatures in the *imago dei* in terms of personalism is a helpful link that could help to renew a different form of natural theology, without some of the pitfalls which a rationalistic link entailed, especially concerning the ability to deduce God from rational arguments. The relational character of personalism provides a central place for such concepts as love to be a sign of the image of God. This has been worked out by a number of theologians lately, including Pannenberg[10] and LaCugna.[11]

The third area needing further research, closely related to the second, is that trinitarian theology would benefit from a broader ecumenical dialogue. When one reads Jenson, it is interesting to observe that he only takes ecumenical theology into consideration in the 1990s. His theology is firmly rooted in Western (German and American) traditions. As has been noted above, his recent readings in Zizioulas seem to have been influential in a reconsideration of his understanding of persons in the Trinity. The importance of reading outside the Western tradition is that it can point to emphases which are overlooked within one's own tradition. The breadth of reading should include not only the Western influenced theologians like Zizioulas and Nissiotis, but culturally diverse writers as well. Recent authors of trinitarian theology published in English include

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[10]W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols., trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), I.422-448.

[11]C. M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 260-265 ff., 350-368.

A. O. Ogbonnaya,[12] and J. Y. Lee.[13] These are challenging books, especially given Ogbonnaya's fairly radical approach to doctrine because of his training in both process and liberationist theology.

More accessible and helpful in the current context is N. A. Miyahira,[14] who explains the Japanese concept of *ningen*. This is translated as "human betweeness" by Miyahira, and is explained as parallel to the Western concept of relationality. The self is "grounded 'in between' itself and them [family]."[15] Much like Macmurray, the idea of relationality is actually prior to the individuality of the subject. It also can be related to the concept of *koinonia*, which is the communion of the trinitarian persons in Orthodox thought.[16] Such a wide cultural spectrum, with a common emphasis on the importance of personal relationality, should be a corrective to overly esoteric psychological interpretations of person, which are unique to the Western tradition. By reading more widely, systematicians can possibly discern areas which had not been clear to them when they were focused narrowly on their own tradition.

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[12]*On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (New York: Paragon House, 1994).

[13]*The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon: 1996).

[14]N. A. Miyahira, "A Japanese Perspective on the Trinity," *Themelios* 22, no. 2 (1997): 39-51.

[15]Ibid., 41.

[16]A good discussion of this concept and how it also relates to anthropology (*imago dei*) is presented in K. Ware, "The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity," *Sobornost* 8, no. 2 (1986): 6-23.

The Trinity is a complex and subtle area of doctrine with a long and interesting tradition behind it. The doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian doctrine of God. The debate over how to understand the three persons of one God continues today, in anthropology as well as the doctrine of God, as personalist theories are sharpened and explored. It is hoped that Jenson's concern for a radically Christian idea of God, which expresses both ontological and biblical uniqueness, will be the goal of systematic theologians. More importantly, though, is that such lofty concerns are not separated from the basic gospel message of the church: "It all has to do, after all, with the simplest of mysteries: that we may in God's own Spirit approach him as Father, because we do so with the man Jesus."[17]

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[17]R. W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 187.

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