Historical Perspectives on Trinitarian Doctrine

by Phillip Cary

In a previous article, "The Logic of Trinitarian Doctrine," I tried to spell out as clearly and simply as possible the basic content of the doctrine of the Trinity. In this article I describe how the doctrine took shape historically and also the historical diversity within the orthodox (i.e. Nicene) tradition of trinitarian thought. In the previous article I focused on teachings that all Nicene theologies have in common, avoiding terms or concepts that were controversial or reflected the viewpoint of one particular tradition or other within the Nicene faith. Hence some notions that are especially familiar to us in the West (like "person") were left out. In this article I bring them back into the story and show how they relate to the basic logic of Nicene doctrine, how they developed out of it and how they raise further questions that are still debated today.

Biblical Reflections before Nicaea

The doctrine of the Trinity originates in Holy Scripture. While the Bible does not contain much by way of explicit trinitarian doctrine, it does continually bear witness to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Trinitarian doctrine results from Christian reflection on how the various aspects of this Biblical witness hang together—for example, how the confession that "the Word was God" (John 1:1) coheres with the confession that God is one (e.g. Deut. 6:4, Isa. 46:9). Trinitarian reflection began historically with Christians attempting to understand what it means to believe that *Christ is God*. Of course there are relatively few Biblical passages that clearly affirm the divinity of Christ (the Prologue to the Gospel of John being probably the most important) but it is worth considering why those passages deserve the pre-eminence they have in trinitarian doctrine.

If the only Gospel in the canon of Scripture were Mark's, then an opponent could plausibly claim that the Gospel gives no support to the doctrine of the Trinity. But when John's Gospel is set beside Mark's and we read them together as joint witnesses to Christ, then the strong claims made about Christ's divinity at the beginning of John end up determining our interpretation of Mark. Logically, this is inevitable: after accepting the truth of the stronger claims, we must interpret the weaker claims to be consistent with them. Weak claims leave questions open, while a strong claim forces a commitment. Thus Mark's Gospel does not confess Christ as God, yet does not rule out the possibility either. But John's Gospel insists on Christ's divinity—so that tells us which of the options left open by Mark we should take. Therefore we interpret Mark's Gospel in light of John's—which is to say, we read the Bible in a trinitarian way. The Bible is a trinitarian document through and through because the whole canon of Scripture must be read together, so that the weaker claims are interpreted consistently with the stronger.

That is why a relatively few Biblical passages served to guide Christian reflection on the Trinity in the first few centuries. When John tells us that the Word is God and existed with God in the beginning before the creation of all things—and then that this Word is none other than

Jesus Christ—that calls for reflection. The most important trinitarian reflections leading up to Nicaea turned on the question of how the Word originated—or, to ask the same question in different terms, how the Son was begotten of the Father. One very early tradition, favored in the West (e.g. by Tertullian and Hippolytus) turned on the metaphor of uttering aloud a word that was originally within the mind.[1] When God utters his Word, that is the begetting of the Son. Subsequently, God uses his Word to create the world.

The odd thing about this teaching, when compared to later trinitarianism, is the notion that there was a state God was in before the begetting of the Son—a state in which the Word dwelt within God and was apparently not yet distinct from God. If you take this state as the natural one for God to be in, you get a form of modalism (or Sabellianism), the heresy which says there are no real, permanent differences between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact from then on until recently, when Western theologians flirted with trinitarian heresy, it was usually some form of modalism—some denial of the proper distinctions between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This early Western view was not *necessarily* modalist, but it was vulnerable to modalist attacks and modalist interpretations. Its great weakness was that it conceived the begetting or generation of the Son as a *process*—something that had a beginning and an end in time, so that there was a point before which it had not yet begun. It was this assumption which led to the problematic notion of a state of God's being before the begetting or generation of the Son. The next great advance in Trinitarian thinking came when Origen, the great theologian of the East, formulated the notion of the *eternal* generation or begetting of the Son. This meant that the Son did not originate in a process in time, and hence there was no point at which it could be said that he was not yet begotten. From all eternity, without any beginning in time, the Father is the cause of the Son's existence.

Whereas the earlier form of trinitarianism had used Stoic philosophical categories, Origen was a Platonist. He used his Platonist philosophy to advantage in articulating the eternal generation of the Son, but in other areas it misled him. For Platonists, all cause-effect relations are hierarchical: the cause is higher, better, and more powerful than the effect. This philosophical theory, applied to the begetting of the Son by the Father, results in "subordinationism." Because the Son is related to the Father as effect to cause, a consistent Platonism must conclude that he is subordinate in being, lower in dignity, and less in power. Hence for example Origen contends that we should not pray to Christ, but only to the Father *through* Christ, because "we should not pray to anyone begotten."[2] One of the key tasks of Greek theology in suceeding centuries was to devise an alternative to this subordinationist interpretation of the pattern of Christian prayer.

Nicea and Divine Substance

Subordinationism bore bad fruit in Alexandria, Origen's hometown, when Arius, a presbyter in the church there, took offense at the old form of trinitarianism on (roughly) Platonist grounds. It cannot be, Arius argued, that the Word originated from within the Father as part of his very being or substance (*ousia*). Unlike Origen, Arius was thinking of begetting as a process,

and of the *ousia* of God as a kind of material substance out of which God was made. He objected to the idea that in coming forth from the Father the Son took some of that substance with him, thus dividing the Father's substance and lessening him. And to give Arius his due, that is indeed an objectionable idea, which orthodox Christian doctrine did eventually reject quite explicitly.

But Arius's solution was worse. He argued that if God alone existed in the beginning, and the Word did not belong to God's very substance, then there was no prior substance the Word could have originated from. So the Word must have been created *from nothing*, just like every other creature—which meant that, just like every other creature, "there was once when he was not." This was the Arian claim which was most offensive to ordinary Christians, and the need to reject it in a really thorough way forced the Orthodox to recognize unambiguously that Christ belonged at the same level of being as God the Father—not subordinate to him. Hence Nicene theology came to reject subordinationism of all kinds along with Arianism.

As a result of its fight against Arianism, the Orthodox came to see more clearly than ever before that there were only two kinds of being: things that God made and the God that made them. The Son of God belongs in the latter category, not the former—he is the Creator, not a creature. That means he stands at exactly the same level of the hierarchy of being as God the Father. He is not a lesser and lower God, but has exactly the same kind of divinity as the Father. He is begotten, not made—eternally generated from the Father rather than created out of nothing. Hence the notion of eternal generation made its way into the creed and into Christian doctrine.

The first worldwide (in Greek, "ecumenical") council of the Christian Church was held in 325 A.D. at Nicaea, not far from Constantinople. There Arius' teaching was condemned and a creed was adopted which affirmed not only Christ's eternal generation but also his being *homo-ousios* with the Father—variously translated as "of the same *ousia*, essence, substance or being" as the Father. As the variety of translations indicates, however, *ousia* is a word of many meanings, and as a result the meaning of the *homo-ousios* clause was not entirely clear and became a matter of fierce debate over the next half century.

The orthodox interpretation of this clause, as well as the final text of what we now call the "Nicene" creed, was not fully settled until after the second ecumenical council, held at Constantinople in 381. In the interval there were orthodox bishops who opposed Nicaea because the *homo-ousios* clause seemed to them to mean that the Father and Son were not two distinct beings (which would make Nicaea modalist or Sabellian). What eventually allowed all the orthodox to agree on Nicaea was an interpretation of *ousia* which associated it with a *kind* of thing, like humanity or divinity (or human nature and divine nature). The point of the *homo-ousios* clause, then, is that Christ not a different or lesser kind of God than the Father; he is "God" in exactly the same sense of the word as the Father. This is all that is needed to rule out Arianism, which is the only point of the clause.

This interpretation of the *homo-ousios* clause is minimalist, in the sense that it makes as few commitments as possible to philosophical theories about *ousia* or essence. It makes weak

claims about the meaning of *ousia* and thus leaves open the possibility of richer, less minimalist interpretations and thereby of stronger claims about the nature of the divine *ousia*.[3] So for example nearly all patristic (as well as medieval and Reformation) theologians affirmed some version of the doctrine of the "simplicity" of the divine *ousia*—a highly abstract metaphysical concept that serves to characterize the unique unity of God and explain why all divine qualities are necessarily one. But this doctrine is not part of the very meaning of the *homo-ousios* clause.

There is however one possible meaning of the clause that the orthodox did intend to rule out, and that is the "materialist" interpretation, according to which *homo-ousios* means something like "made out of the same stuff." That would make the divine essence or *ousia* into a kind of material out of which the Father and Son were both made—like two rings made of gold. In that case Arius would be right to object that the divine substance was divided, and the Father was lessened by giving birth to the Son. Not only that, the divine substance or *ousia* would be something other than Father and Son, a thing underlying them both and more fundamental than they are—as gold exists before the rings which are made out of it and could continue to exist even if the rings were melted down and destroyed. The general point is that the divine *ousia* cannot mean some fourth thing behind, beneath or before Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For there is no God or divine essence other than the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, what all Nicene theologies can and do say about the divine *ousia* is that the Father gives his *whole* ousia or essence to the Son in begetting him (cf. John 5:26 and 16:15). This is quite unmaterialistic. Imagine making a second ring out of exactly the same gold as the first—it's quite impossible unless you destroy the first one. Yet God the Father is not destroyed but precisely becomes Father in begetting the Son. He is eternally giving away *all* of his substance to his beloved Son and thereby becoming himself—one of the many lovely implications the doctrine of the Trinity in all its glorious strangeness. The divine *ousia* or substance originates with the Father and is wholly bestowed on the Son and Holy Spirit, so that giving and receiving is at the heart of the Triune life of God.

The Cappadocians and Augustine

The orthodox interpretation of Nicaea was formulated by three Greek Church Fathers from Cappadocia in Asia Minor: Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, his brother, and Gregory Naziansen, Basil's friend, who presided at the council of Constantinople in 381, where his orations on the doctrine of the Trinity earned him the title "the Theologian" (i.e. the pre-eminent interpreter of the Christian doctrine of God). These Cappadocian Fathers not only established the meaning of *ousia* as *kind* of thing (by contrasting it with "hypostasis," which they gave the technical meaning of *particular* thing), they also developed the Nicene council's confession of the divinity of Christ into a fully trinitarian doctrine by insisting on the full divinity of the Holy Spirit as well—so that the Holy Spirit too is *homo-ousios* with the Father.

As a result, the Cappadocians were the first to face the question: why not three Gods? If there are three distinct particular things (i.e. hypostases) that are each divine in exactly the same sense, then why are they not three gods—just as three distinct human hypostases (like Peter, Paul and Mary) make three humans? In the previous article, I discussed the Cappadocian answer and

its implications at some length. The basic idea is that all general terms (wisdom, power, goodness) refer to God in the singular: there is only one wisdom, one power, one goodness in God, not three. But the Cappadocians went farther than that. They taught that there is only one Will and Activity (Greek *energeia*, Latin *operatio*) in God. It is not like Peter, Paul and Mary, who may co-operate with one another or not as they choose. Everything God does is done by Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together. They do not merely agree, having three wills in harmony, but rather have only one Will in the first place. Hence Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three distinct centers of willing and activity that may or may not harmonize. Every work of God is necessarily the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the work of one God.

The Eastern Churches have always looked to the Cappadocian Fathers, together with Athanasius (bishop of Alexandria in the period between the first two ecumenical councils) as a kind of gold standard of Nicene trinitarianism—and this judgement has come to predominate also in today's ecumenical discussions between the various Nicene churches. That means in effect that Eastern trinitarianism has come to be accepted as the standard by which Western trinitarianism is judged. If the Latin tradition (i.e. Roman Catholics and Protestants) stray too far from the Cappadocian interpretation enshrined in the Greek and other Eastern Orthodox churches, the presumption is that the Latin developments are at best optional and at worst a mistake. I share that presumption, but I also think the contrast between West and East has often been overdrawn. My study of Augustine, the great fountainhead of the distinctively Western tradition of Nicene trinitarianism, has convinced me that he does not depart from the Cappadocian theology, except in the sense that he builds on it and asks the appropriate questions for someone who has understood its point.

Working in the generation after the council of Constantinople, Augustine wrote a multi-volume treatise *On the Trinity*, which has had great influence on Western thought.   In books 5-7 of this treatise, he works out the logic of the Cappadocian doctrine in great detail, using categories borrowed from Aristotle. Building on the Cappadocian answer to the question, "Why not three Gods?" he proceeds to ask what is logically the next question: "three *what*?"[4] That is to say, if every general term (like God, Creator, Wisdom, Power) describes what is one in God rather than what is three, then what general term do we have for *what* the three are? None, really, says Augustine, except a very abstract term for "particular individual," such as the Greek term *hypostasis* and the Latin term *persona*.

Hypostasis and "Person"

With this we come upon an immportant and easily misunderstood piece of terminology. Augustine's Latin word *persona* did not have the same range of meanings as our English word "person." It did not suggest much of what we now associate with "personhood" or "personality," and in particular contained no hint of an inner self or ego or center of self-consciousness. In fact these are specifically modern ideas. The closest equivalent to them in ancient thought is soul, mind, or will—and the Nicene Fathers all agree that "soul" is an inappropriate concept to apply to God and that the other two apply to God only in the singular. Hence God is *not* three persons in the modern sense of the word—for three distinct divine persons, with three distinct minds, wills and centers of consciousness, would surely be three Gods (just as the Cappadocians said).

Augustine used the word *persona* because it was the standard technical term in Latin to designate what was three rather than one in the Trinity. It had first been used for this purpose by Tertullian two centuries earlier. What exactly Tertullian had in mind is still a matter of dispute, but it is useful to know that originally *persona* meant "mask", and then "character or role in a play" (since actors in ancient dramas always wore masks representing their particular characters—hence even today a playbill often begins with a list of characters called in Latin *dramatis personae*, literally "masks of the drama"). That meaning branched out to include characters in the "drama" of a conversation or a trial at court. Finally, it was used to indicate the concrete presence of an individual person (like a character on the stage or in the courtroom). But notice that in all these senses we are looking at persons "from outside," perceiving their concrete individuality but not their inner consciousness. Thus when Tertullian originally introduced the term *persona*, he may have had in mind the distinct roles played by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the drama of salvation, or he may have intended to say something like "concrete individual"—but in either case what he did not have in mind was will or consciousness or inner self.

Despite the significant shifts in meaning of the word "person" over the past two millenia, well-informed Latin trinitarianism has always been aware that "three persons" does not mean three minds or wills or centers of consciousness. One crucial moment in the history of the word should be noted, however. In the century after Augustine, the Christian philosopher Boethius gave what was to become the standard definition of *persona* for Latin trinitarianism: "individual substance of rational nature." "Individual substance" clearly means *hypostasis* (Latin "subsistence," equivalent to Aristotle's "primary substance"). To this Boethius adds the notion of rationality: persons are not just any kind of individual substance (such as a tree or a dog) but rational ones. The phrasing is crucial: "of rational nature" is in the singular, and suggests that there is one rationality or rational nature that all rational beings share (just as all humans share in one human nature). Hence the trinitarian implication is not that there are three minds or rationalities in the Trinity but rather only one "rational nature"—just as there is only one Wisdom, Power, Will, and so on.

Interpreting the word "person" in this way, the West has for many centuries said the same thing as the East in different words: while the East says God is three hypostases with one essence (*ousia*), the West says God is three persons in one substance (*substantia*). As a final terminological note, the East did have an equivalent to *persona*, the Greek word *prosopon*, but it was never quite so central a term as "person" in the West. When they want to be really precise, the Eastern theologians always prefer to talk of "hypostases." Given the shifting meanings of the word "person," it is a good idea for Western theologians to follow suit.

Social and Psychological Analogies

So far we have seen only agreement between West and East—saying the same thing in different words. Now we need to examine a divergence between East and West that has been much overplayed in 20th-century scholarship. You will often read about the contrast between the Western "psychological" Trinity and the Eastern "social" Trinity. While there is some truth to

the notion that the West favors "psychological" analogies for the Trinity, to talk of "social trinitarianism" in the East is wildly misleading at best. Genuinely social doctrines, in which the Trinity is conceived of on the model of a society of three human persons, are a recent Western phenomenon, dependent on the *modern* notion of "person." To ascribe a "social" Trinity to the Greek Fathers is to read modern Western preocupations into ancient Eastern theology.

First of all, it is important to see that both "social" and "psychological" imagery for the Trinity is rooted in Scripture, which confesses Christ as both Son of God and Word of God. To speak of "Father and Son" suggests "social" imagery for the Trinity, while to speak of God and his Word suggests "psychological" imagery. In the first case we seem to be talking about two persons and in the second case about one—or at least that is how it would seem if we took either of these images literally. But of course, the Church Fathers repeatedly pointed out that taking either set of images literally is a grave mistake, because God is not like human persons. (Humans are made in the image of God, but God is not made in the image of humanity!) God the Father and God the Son are not like a human father and son, for the latter are two men but the former are not two Gods. And the eternal Word of God is not like an inner word in a human mind, because the human word is *part of* the human mind, not a complete individual being like the Word of God. In other words, social analogies taken literally become tritheist, and psychological analogies taken literally become modalist. Hence no Nicene theology has ever been thoroughly "psychological" or thoroughly "social."

"Psychological" analogies (i.e. talk about the Word and Spirit of God) are of course found in both Eastern and Western theologians. But it is true that more tends to be made of such talk in the West. This is mainly because of the influence of Augustine, who in the second half of his treatise *On the Trinity* (book 7-15) took Biblical talk of Word and Spirit as a clue to the "traces of the Trinity" (*vestigia trinitatis*) in the human soul. (Note, he never said the Triune God resembles a human soul, but rather that the human soul resembles the Triune God). Later Western theologians, most notably Thomas Aquinas in the middle ages, extended this line of reflection into "psychological" analogies, where the begetting of the Son is like the conception of a word in the heart, and the procession of the Spirit is like the origin of love in the soul.[5]

On the other hand, "social" analogies for the Trinity (i.e. talk of Father and Son) are commonplace in both traditions, but have never been developed in a speculative way like the Western psychological analogies—until recently, with the rise of "social trinitarianism" in the West. You will often find scholars (usually Westerners) who say the Greeks or the Cappadocians developed a distinctively social trinitarianism, but this is simply not true. As we have seen, the Cappadocians compared the Trinity to a society of three human beings precisely in order to show why the comparison breaks down—i.e. why the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three Gods, *unlike* Peter, Paul and Mary, who are three humans.[6]

East and West

False contrasts between East and West have unfortunately obscured the extent to which there have been specifically Western problems with *both* types of imagery. To begin with, as we have seen, since long before Nicaea Western theologians less astute than Augustine have been

led into modalism by taking the analogy between God and a human mind too seriously. This is not just a theoretical problem: it means in practice that many Westerners (especially in the past two centuries) have worshipped and prayed in a less than Trinitarian fashion. You will hear contemporary churchgoers wondering whether all the liturgical talk about Father, Son and Holy Spirit is really necessary, and whether it wouldn't be simpler just to talk about "God"—as if we knew what we were talking about when we used *that* word!

One of the great blessings of the past few decades of ecumenical discussion is that Eastern trinitarianism, and especially Eastern liturgical theology, has pushed the West to be more self-consciously trinitarian in its worship and teaching. The most successful ecumenical dialogues have the doctrine of the Trinity as their foundation and touchstone, and the need for East and West to think together about this doctrine has produced some of the most beautiful theology of this or any century (interestingly, the best Trinitarian theology of our time seems to be concentrated not in treatises on the Trinity but in work on ecclesiology and the sacraments).

On the other hand, it is a good idea to be wary of Western theologians who have nothing but praise for the East and complaints about the West—as if they hated their own heritage and envied the others'. Of course in the present disarray of Western (especially Protestant) theology, there is much for us to learn from the Eastern Orthodox—but that is because modern Christians can always learn from ancient orthodoxy, whether of East or West. Recently, however, some Western theologians have looked to Eastern Christianity the way that secular Western intellectuals sometimes look to Eastern philosophies or religions such as Buddhism—as if those beautiful far-away ideas were just the thing to solve our problems here at home. When that happens, Westerners inevitably practice a form of cultural imperialism, reading their own preoccupations into other traditions.

In our case, the key Western preoccupation of the day no doubt goes under names like "community," "mutuality" and "relationality."[7] Liberal theology, which a century ago had no use for the supposedly abstract and "speculative" doctrine of the eternal Trinity, is now more likely to see in it a reflection of human aspirations for a community of mutual love and equal relationships. *Equal* the three hypostases of the Trinity certainly are—that is stressed by both East and West. But neither tradition has (until the past hundred years) spoken of a community or society of three. An explicit "social analogy" for the Trinity is in fact a modern Western development, emerging in liberal Protestantism with roots in idealist philosophy.[8]

Of the two traditions, the East is least hospitable to such notions, precisely because the Cappadocians gave such a radical answer to the question "why not three Gods?" If (as the Cappadocians insisted) there is only one divine Will and Activity, not three, it is hard to see how the Son can love the Father with a love that is different from the Father's love for the Son. "Mutual love" between two different persons is obviously not the guiding metaphor in Cappadocian trinitarianism. To develop such a notion within a Cappadocian framework, one would have to stress that the love of the Father for the Son belongs not to the one Will of God but to the distinctive relation of begetting by which the Father gives his *ousia* to the Son. It is in fact the West which has developed such a notion most thoroughly, in the context of its psychological analogies. However, rather than distinguishing the Father's love for the Son from

the Son's love for the Father, the usual Western suggestion ever since Augustine has been that this Love is one, because it is itself the Holy Spirit, who is literally the hypostatized love of God and as such the bond of love (*vinculum amoris*) between the Father and the Son.

Filioque

There is something right and beautiful about this notion, and it is not foreign to Scripture.[9] But unfortunately it is closely connected to the most serious point of disagreement between East and West. Precisely to the extent that the Holy Spirit is both the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father, he must proceed *from both the Father and the Son*. This notion of "double procession" found its way into Western versions of the Nicene creed in the *filioque* clause, which says that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father *and the Son*." The Eastern Orthodox do not agree with this theology of double procession, insisting instead that Spirit proceeds only from the Father *through* the Son (Gregory of Nyssa once said it was like a third torch being lit from a middle torch which had been lit by a first). While the West tends to picture the Trinity as a kind of triangle (Father begets Son equal to himself, and Son and Father between them produce the Holy Spirit), the East pictures a straight line from Father through Son to Spirit. But the difference is more than just a matter of pictures; it is a disagreement about causal relations of origin—i.e. about precisely those things which (as discussed in the previous article) give the three hypostases their distinctive identities.

Although the Eastern Orthodox disagree with the Western doctrine of double procession, most of them are willing to grant that it is not necessarily contrary to the Nicene faith. What they all object to, however, is the Western Church inserting the *filioque* clause in the Creed without their consent and approval. Recently, ecumenical attempts have been made to interpret the clause in ways that would not be offensive to Easterners, but the sticking point remains that by keeping this clause in its Creed, the West seems to be saying that it is a necessary part of the Nicene faith—a claim that is wholly unacceptable to the East. On this point the Western churches appear ready to concede the East's point and remove the clause from the creed or at least recognize that it is optional, not required. Even in the Roman Catholic communion, which remains officially committed to the *filioque* clause as authoritative doctrine, the "Eastern Rite" churches are allowed to use the Creed without the *filioque* clause—suggesting that the clause is not required for the integrity of the faith.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that both Eastern and Western views have dangers and both traditions have built-in correctives for those dangers. Since we are Westerners, it behooves us to be particularly concerned about our own dangers, and also about the dangers of an ill-informed and one-sided appropriation of Eastern ideas. Western "psychological analogies" can become *modalist* if not corrected by the understanding that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are complete individual beings (*hypostases*). On the other hand, Western talk about "three persons" can become *tritheist* if "person" is interpreted in the modern sense, as many "social trinitarians" wish to do. Finally, the Eastern view poses the danger of *subordinationism* if Westerners do not understand the built-in safeguards against it. The most important of these safeguards is simply

the *homo-ousios* clause of the Nicene Creed. Another is the doctrine called *perichoresis*, which teaches that the each hypostasis of the Trinity has its being *in* the other two.[10]

Also indispensable as a safeguard is the Eastern distinction between "theology" (theologia, which in Greek Orthodox usage means the doctrine of the nature of God in eternity, which focusses on the Trinity) and "economy" (*oikonomia* or God's plan of salvation in history, which focusses on the Incarnation). When Easterners want to explain how the Son's love for the Father can be something different from the Father's love for the Son, they point to "the economy," i.e. to the Incarnation. Because the incarnate Christ is man as well as God, he has a human will which is distinct from his divine will. While his divine will is exactly the same thing as the Father's, his human will is different. Hence as a human being, he can submit his will to the Father in loving obedience, facing the Father's will as something *other* than his own (thus saying at Gethsemane: *not my will*, but thine be done"). Without this distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, we would have to interpret the obedience of Christ to the Father as an indication that even in his divine being he was subordinate to the Father—and that would be the end of Nicene trinitarianism. This same distinction comes into play when interpreting Christ's saying, "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). The Father is not greater than Christ in his divine nature ("according to the theology") but is of course greater that Christ in his humanity ("according to the economy").

Hence one symptom of Westerners' missing the point of Eastern theology is the recent tendency to downplay or even eliminate the distinction between "immanent Trinity" and "economic Trinity"—i.e. the difference between the eternal relations of begetting and proceeding in the Trinity, and the roles played in the history of of salvation by God the Father, the incarnate Son, and the pentecostal Spirit. Without the "immanent/economic" distinction, the pattern of trinitarian relations "from the Father through the Son to the Spirit" (and its converse, our prayer "to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit") is subordinationist—as the case of Origen illustrates. Subordinationism has always been the heretical temptation of the East, as modalism was until recently of the West. That is precisely why Nicene theologians in the East have always insisted so strongly on the distinction between immanent and economic doctrines of the Trinity or (in their terms) theology and economy. Western theologians would do well to understand this point.

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Young, F., *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: a Guide to the Literature and its Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Fine introduction to serious reading of patristic literature in the formative period of Nicene orthodoxy.

B. Major 20th Century Statements:

Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, chapter 2 (pp. 295-489). A major influence on the revival of trinitarian thinking in the 20th century, Barth's work is as always challenging and instructive, because he makes a serious effort to hear God's Word rather than respond to the supposed theological needs of the time.

LaCugna, C., *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991). A major Rahnerian statement, both historical and systematic, that is likely to be a focus of discussion in five to ten years. (See review, below).

Moltmann, J., *Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981). Influential statement of a socio-political doctrine of the Trinity.

Rahner, K., *The Trinity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970). For better and worse, the single most influential treatment of doctrine of the Trinity in the 20th century.

NOTES

1. The word in the mind is *logos endiathetos*; the word uttered aloud is *logos prophorikos*. The terminology originated with the Stoics.

2. Origen *On Prayer*, §15.

3. Note, by the way, that here we are in a different situation than with the strong claims about Christ's divinity in Scripture. There the strong claims were *part of the canon*, and therefore obligatory to be believed. Here the strong claims are not an integral part of the Nicene faith, and therefore are optional.

4. *On the Trinity* 5:9.10 and 7:4.7-9. This famous question is often quoted in Latin: *quid tres*?

5. Aquinas gives a brief presentation of trinitarian theology in his *Compendium of Theology* §§37-67. The full treatment, of course, is in his *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Questions 27-43.

6. Scholarly mistakes sometimes acquire a life of their own as one scholar after another repeats an erroneous opinion without troubling to do a careful reading of the original sources. Two such mistakes in the history of trinitarian doctrine are (1) that the Cappadocians had a social doctrine of the Trinity and (2) that Augustine, in contrast to the Cappadocians, "started with" the unity of the divine essence rather than the distinction of the three persons. This is simply not an accurate account of the shape of Augustine's trinitarian inquiries (for Augustine's actual starting point see *On the Trinity* 1:4.7). Augustine begins where the Cappadocians leave off: accepting their answer to the question "why not three Gods?" he proceeds to ask "three *what*?" His concern is to elaborate the distinctions between the three on the assumption that they are one God. Augustine never uses the divine essence *per se* as his starting point. That would be a more accurate description of Aquinas' procedure.

7. As discussed in the previous article, the Church Fathers used the logical category of *relation* to indicate what distinguished Father, Son and Holy Spirit from one another. This category includes trinitarian relations like "is the Son of" but also quite ordinary and trivial relations like "is taller than." Hence "relation," as the Church Fathers use the term, is a strictly logical category, not to be confused with modern notions such as "personal relationships" (though many recent treatments of the Trinity seem to trade on just such a confusion). Nor did the Church Fathers ever show any interest in "relationality" or "relational ontology"—which would be a highly abstract inquiry that they had no time for.

8. For the early history of social trinitarianism, cf. C. Welch, *In This Name: the Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1952), pp. 29-34 and 133-151. Since Welch wrote, Moltmann and many others have developed influential forms of social trinitarianism, most of which rather blithely run the risk of tritheism.

9. Augustine arrives at the identification of the Spirit as Love from a meditation on 1 John 4:7ff

("God is love"). Also important is Eph. 4:13 ("the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"), which Augustine takes to be referring to the unifying power of love. Cf. *On the Trinity* 15:17.31 and 6:5.7. We might add Romans 5:5 ("the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit").

10. This doctrine is an extension of the Biblical teaching that the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son (john 14:10), developed by the Cappadocians (e.g. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* §18). The actual term *perichoresis* comes later, in John of Damascus, Eastern theologian of the 7th century. The idea was accepted by Western theology (and usually translated either "circuminsession" or "circumincession") beginning with the 12th century, when John's treatise *On the Orthodox Faith* was translated into Latin and circulated in the medieval schools in the generation before Thomas Aquinas.