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PERSONS ACCORDING TO ESSENCE

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By the grace of God,
Shown most recently in the kindness of my wife Sydney,
To honor her support and endurance in the completion of this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION: GOD IS A PERSON	1
The Problem of Personhood.....	3
Pro-Nicene Witness.....	6
Athanasius's "Letters to Serapion"	6
Basil's "On the Holy Spirit"	8
Augustine's "On the Trinity"	11
Synthesis	13
Medieval Witness.....	15
Conclusion	18
2. ESSENTIALLY EMBODIED: THE BODY IN RELATIONSHIP TO HUMAN PERSONHOOD	19
Negative Attitudes Toward the Body.....	20
A Biblical Theology of Embodiment.....	24
Embodied Origin	25
Temporary State.....	29
Athanasius' "On the Incarnation"	31
Conclusion	36
3. THE NECESSITY FOR QUALIFICATION	37

	Page
A Conflated Person and Essence Dictum.....	38
Toward a Revised Theological Grammar	42
Retrieving Gregory of Nazianzus.....	44
Conclusion	48
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	49

PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: GOD IS A PERSON

One fundamental area of service Christian theology contributed to the church and society throughout the centuries is its precise use of language. Christian theologians have employed biblical reasoning to convey Scriptural truths in carefully crafted claims in service of its day. However, personhood is a convoluted term in its contemporary Christian use, but it is not unmarked territory in Christian theology. In particular, the loose usage of personhood language is one significant issue that is potentially problematic when untreated or presumed. Fundamentally, it is necessary to add a distinctive characteristic for what is meant when attributing personhood to someone. This thesis argues that persons should be explained in accordance to their distinctive essence.

This organizing argument will be explained and elaborated across three chapters. This first chapter will explore that personhood is a truly Christian term, particularly in its employment when articulating the nature of God as a Triune being throughout the centuries. It will show that whenever God is described as a person, it is always explained in conjunction of the uniqueness of divine essence as a crucial factor. The second chapter will show that human personhood cannot be properly explored apart from human nature, especially as it is revealed through embodiment. Lastly, the third and final chapter will address concerns that exist when personhood is defined and employed apart from essence.

Jürgen Moltmann claimed that affirming “the personhood of the [Holy] Spirit is the most difficult problem in pneumatology.”¹ Be that as it may, Christians throughout

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl

the centuries recognized that Scripture identifies the Holy Spirit as one of the three divine persons of the Trinity, and therefore confidently confessed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” This chapter demonstrates that while the notion of personhood is a developing category in the theology of the church, the affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s personhood in particular was rightly deduced by the early church’s reflection on the testimony of Scripture, generating fundamental categories through which personhood can be understood in relation to essence. Simply, the church’s defense of the Holy Spirit’s personhood highlights that persons are qualified by nature.

Personhood is an evolving category in Christian theology when exploring the historical development of the term person as employed to explain Scripture’s distinctions between the members of the Godhead. Nevertheless, Nicene and Pro-Nicene theologians Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, and Augustine of Hippo reflect a consistent pattern of interpretation that identifies the Spirit as a person as presented by the biblical witness, although also demonstrating a developing classification of what is a person.² In reaffirming the difficult claim that the Holy Spirit can indeed be called a person, they demonstrate that divine persons must be explained in accordance to their divinity. Moreover, while these Nicene and Pro-Nicene theologians do not offer a comparably sophisticated definition of ‘person’ that later medieval theologians Boethius and Aquinas articulate, the early theology summarized in the Nicene Creed sufficiently displays an accurate description of what it means for the Holy Spirit to be a person, and frame significant categories for how later theologians will expand notions of personhood.³

(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 268.

² Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6. Ayres defines “Pro-Nicene” as those theologies, appearing from the 360s to the 380s, consisting of a set of arguments about the nature of the Trinity and about the enterprise of Trinitarian theology, and forming the basis of Nicene Christian belief in the 380s... these accounts constituted a set of arguments *for* Nicaea—hence *pro*-Nicene. *Ibid.*

³ I refer to Nicene Creed of 381 AD.

The Problem of Personhood

The employment of the term person in Christian theology predates the fourth century debates and formulation of the Nicene Creed significantly. In the second century, Tertullian leverages the term ‘persona’ to demonstrate that the Son’s role is distinct from the Father’s in the divine economy.⁴ He felt it necessary to utilize a non-biblical term to explain what he rightly observed in Scripture. While this term is not directly used in Scripture, Tertullian’s influence to employ it in articulating Trinitarian theology is unmistakable.

Second century usage of the word person emphasized one’s role in society.⁵ Latin and Greek philosophers eventually developed the conclusions of Plato and Aristotle to organize society around different types of persons, highlighting the place one had as a contributor to society’s common good. The term undoubtedly is intended to identify an individual by observing one’s assigned role in the world. Yet, the variety of connotations within Greek philosophy does not imply that later uses of this term carry identical correspondence. Tertullian, for example, uses “persona” to emphasize the Son’s unity with the Father as a consubstantial being.⁶ For Tertullian, the “role” of the Son, his place in relationship with the rest of the world, is that of divinity. Therefore, the discussion of personhood needs to be regularly qualified when addressing God.

For example, the employment of the Latin term ‘persona,’ and its Greek translation ‘hypostasis,’ provoked an important ecclesiastical debate concerning the distinction between a person and a substance that consumed much of the fourth century theological landscape.⁷ Namely, Latin and Greek Christians struggled to accurately

⁴ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 27.

⁵ John M. Rist, *What Is a Person?: Realities, Constructs, Illusions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.), 25-28.

⁶ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 73-76.

⁷ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 182-185.

explain what it means for God to be one in substance and yet subsist as distinct persons. Both in its Latin and Greek connotation, the term shares a common definition, but unique cultural implication. As this paper will yet demonstrate, these debates proved to be a productive period in the church's history, providing several valuable theological treatments explaining the distinction between God's substance and persons, and eventually culminating in the affirmation of the Nicene Creed.

The earliest reference to this particularly lexical debate dates a century prior to the ecumenical councils in Origen's use of 'hypostasis' to indicate the real and distinct existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁸ Lewis Ayres contends that Origen's commentary on John's gospel, where he explicitly acknowledges the three hypostases in the Godhead, begins the tradition of using this term in the sense of "individual circumscribed existence" that will be expanded in the Trinitarian treatments of Pro-Nicene orthodoxy.⁹ It is no surprise, however, that this tension in distinguishing between essence and persons was repeated in the life of the church as she sought faithfully to communicate the teaching of Scripture.

Finally, Nicene and Pro-Nicene theologians helpfully identify the dangers of minimizing the personhood of the Holy Spirit both in terms of rightly understanding the nature of God and rightly handling the testimony of Scripture. For example, an approach that merely identifies the Spirit when he is explicitly referenced, and similarly disregards rules for a theological interpretation of Scripture, will naturally underappreciate the biblical account as it pertains to the Spirit and his unique role in the Godhead.¹⁰ Moreover, in taking the biblical evidence into account, one ought to determine whether

⁸ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 25.

⁹ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 25.

¹⁰ Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 26, 28. Cole argues for a theological minimalist position when interpreting Scripture, so that the doctrine of the Spirit can be developed from an evidence-based practice of reading Scripture, out of concern that dogmatic speculation may compromise the authority of the biblical text's witness.

the Spirit is merely a secondary character in its narrative, or the chief protagonist as its divine author. Contrary to the Enlightenment luminaries of the 18th century that tended to relativize the significance of Trinitarian theology, it is rather fundamental to ground theological inquiry in the doctrine of God.¹¹

Personhood is a convoluted concept. Both in antiquity and modernity, this language demanded significant qualification and correction. However, a proper synthesis between the biblical accounts of the Spirit's personhood, and its relationship to the doctrine of God, necessarily draw out implications for a concept of personhood generally that extend across other theological loci. The personhood of the Spirit, then, is an issue that transcends its conceptual inheritance in antiquity, as well as its modern antipathy. It is a generative doctrine that, when properly located, affords needed categories to determine personhood broadly.

Understanding the person of the Spirit requires at least a definition of personhood, and an assessment of what he would be otherwise. Graham Cole suggests a minimal definition of personhood as "a being who can say 'I' with self-reflexivity or, put another way, with self-awareness."¹² However, as it will be noted, this kind of minimalist definition lacks the necessary specificity that is clarified when affirming the Spirit's divine being as a qualification to his person. In other words, under this framework the Spirit can be a self-aware person if he were a force or angel. But Scripture demands that his personhood be understood in relation to the divine being. And it is this clarification that becomes highlighted by the subsequent theologians.

¹¹ Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 60. Cole rightly traces these influences illustrated by Emmanuel Kant's claim, "the doctrine of the Trinity... has no practical relevance at all," and Friedrich Schleiermacher's infamous summary of the doctrine of the Trinity as a conclusion to his dogmatic work.

¹² Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 66.

Nicene and Pro-Nicene Witness

Athanasius, Basil, and Augustine have the very specific theological aim to identify the distinct persons in the Trinity as observed in Scripture. They are not primarily burdened to develop an exhaustive treatment of the metaphysics of a person, but rather seek to affirm the apostolic testimony and teaching of Scripture that God exists distinctly as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Athanasius's "Letters to Serapion"

In the three letters to bishop Serapion, Athanasius defends Trinitarian doctrine against the theological errors of the group he describes as "tropikoi" (Mis-interpreters) given their denial of the Spirit's divinity.¹³ These letters adequately represent Athanasius' Trinitarian convictions, but its specific application to the person and work of the Holy Spirit makes its contribution invaluable to this discussion. Two significant arguments in Athanasius' letters include his defense that the Holy Spirit is different than created beings as true God, and his repeated emphasis that the Spirit participates in a unique relation with the Father and the Son as distinct from the two.

Firstly, Athanasius clearly demonstrates that the Spirit is divine and true God, while also distinct from the Father and Son and inseparably one with the other two. He importantly identifies the Spirit as a divine being by contrasting his existence with that of created beings. Namely, while creatures are subject to change, the Spirit is an agent of change and never experiences change.¹⁴

The Spirit is said to be life-giving: *The one who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who dwells in us* [Rom 8:11]... As has been said, creatures are given life through him. But he does not participate in life, but is himself participated in and gives life to creatures: what sort

¹³ Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres; Introduction to *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius's Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit, and, Didymus's on the Holy Spirit*. Popular Patristics Series, 43 (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 21.

¹⁴ Athanasius, *Serap*, 1.22.1-27.4

of affinity does he have with things which have come into existence?¹⁵

Further, early in his first letter Athanasius introduces the unity of the Spirit with the Father and the Son as a corrective from misidentifying his divine essence, affirming that sound thinking about the Son leads to sound thinking about the Spirit “who proceeds from the Father” (John 14:26).¹⁶ Athanasius’ argument can be summarized as an affirmation that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and Christ, directly associating the Spirit with the persons of the Father and the Son, while rightly affirming the oneness of essence in the three. “But if there is such co-ordination and unity within the holy Triad, who can separate either the Son from the Father or the Spirit from the Son or from the Father Himself?”¹⁷ The inseparable nature of the three attests to their oneness of being and the uncreated nature of the Spirit.

Secondly, the inseparable nature of the Trinity is testified in the unique relations of the persons. An important argument Athanasius raises concerns biblical language that addresses the Spirit in a qualified manner, describing his unique relation to the Father and Son: “Spirit of Jesus,” “my Spirit,” “of God,” “of the Father,” “from the Father,” etc.¹⁸ This association displays both the Spirit’s origin, as one that proceeds from the Father and the Son directly and eternally, while simultaneously testifying to his unique existence as an uncreated being that is identified within God. Simply, the Spirit is God because he is the Spirit of God and Christ; he shares what is common to the two other persons as one that cannot be divided from them.

Moreover, this argument on account of “fromness” does not belittle the uniqueness of the Spirit’s work within the Godhead, even though the three act inseparably. Concerning the Spirit’s participation in creation, Athanasius explains,

¹⁵ Athanasius, *Serap*, 1.20.1

¹⁶ Athanasius, *Serap*, 1.2.3-6

¹⁷ Athanasius, *Serap*, 1.20.

¹⁸ Athanasius, *Serap*, 1.4.1-6.13.

The Son, like the Father, is creator; for he says, “What things I see the Father doing, these things I also do.”... But if the Son, being, like the Father, creator, is not a creature; and if, because all things were created through him, he does not belong to things created: then, clearly, neither is the Spirit a creature. For it is written, concerning him in Psalm 103: “Thou shalt take away their spirit, and they shall die and return to their dust. Thou shalt put forth thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.” As it is thus written, it is clear that the Spirit is not a creature, but takes part in the action of creation. The Father creates all things through the Word in the Spirit... the Father himself, through the Word in the Spirit works and gives all things.¹⁹

While the participation of the Spirit in the work of creation testifies to his divinity and unity with the Father and Son, Athanasius further explains that the inseparability of the three is the basis through which the Holy Spirit actualizes all divine blessings that come from the Father to the Son.²⁰ He argues from Paul,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all [2 Cor 13:13]. For this grace and gift given in the Trinity is given by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Just as the grace given through the Son is from the Father, so too we cannot have fellowship with the gift except in the Holy Spirit. For it is when we participate in the Spirit that we have the love of the Father and the grace of the Son and fellowship of the Spirit himself.²¹

The unity of God is the precedent through which Athanasius understands the person and works of the Holy Spirit. Through it, he synthesizes the accounts of biblical language and explicit texts that reference the Spirit’s unique roles. Therefore, Athanasius shows that the Holy Spirit is unique by distinguishing him from created beings and attesting to his unique relations within the Trinity.

Basil’s “On the Holy Spirit”

Basil’s work “On the Holy Spirit,” expands his prior letter where he defends the unique work and person of the Spirit, “Against Eunomius.”²² Basil’s arguments for

¹⁹ Athanasius, *Serap*, 3.4-5.

²⁰ Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, vol. 27. (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 94-97.

²¹ Athanasius, *Serap*, 1.30.6-7.

²² Stephen M. Hildebrand, Introduction to *On the Holy Spirit*, Popular Patristics Series, 42. (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 23-25.

the divinity and distinction of the Holy Spirit are similar to Athanasius, as he employs many of the same theological methods. However, his emphasis on the Spirit's work as revealer, and his place as third in the Godhead, advance a further degree of clarity to discerning his unique personhood.

Firstly, the Spirit's role as revealer is chiefly demonstrated in his revealing of the Son and the Father. Basil argues that no one can know the Father or the Son apart from the Spirit. "Just like the sun, he [the Spirit] will use the eye that has been cleansed to show you in himself the image of the invisible, and in the blessed vision of the image you will see the unspeakable beauty of the archetype."²³ He gives repeated attention to 1 Corinthians 12:3, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit," by noting the preposition "in" displays the unique presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.²⁴ It is in recognizing the direct link between the Spirit and the Son, while maintaining the Spirit's distinct activity, that Basil is able to affirm God is known through the Spirit.

But the Spirit is called Christ's, as he has been made kin to him in nature. On account of this, "if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him" (Rom 9:9)... As the Spirit of Wisdom, he reveals in his own greatness Christ, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God... The way then, to knowledge of God is from the one Spirit, through the one Son, to the one Father.²⁵

Similar to Athanasius, Basil depends upon the oneness of God to properly explore the distinction between the divine persons. The qualified manner to speak of the Spirit, as the Spirit of God and Christ, enables him to synthesize biblical data regarding the unique role of the Spirit without compromising divine unity. Yet he goes a step further than Athanasius in demanding direct acknowledgment of the Spirit, equating a denial of the Spirit with a denial of Christ through applying 1 Corinthians 13:3 and John 1:18.

²³ Basil, *Spir*, 9.23.

²⁴ Haykin, *The Spirit of God*, 126-7.

²⁵ Basil, *Spir*, 18.46-47

“Such a person is bereft of true worship, for he cannot worship the Son except in the Holy Spirit, and he cannot call upon the Father, except in the Spirit of adopted sonship.²⁶ Basil explicitly commends worship to the Holy Spirit on account of his unique work in the believer’s life as revealer of the Trinity.

Secondly, the “thirdness” of the Spirit within the Godhead further distinguishes his person from the Father and the Son. As already noted, Basil rightly recognizes the unity of the Godhead, but notices that the Spirit is often described as third in order, while never in essence. He observes this a pattern where the Spirit completes what the Father accomplishes through the Son.²⁷ For example, in the creation of angels, Basil affirms that “[these] exist by the will of the Father, they are brought into being by the energy of the Son, and they are perfected by the presence of the Spirit.”²⁸ Utilizing the incarnation as chief example, Basil writes,

Who would deny that the accommodations made for man by ‘our great God and savior Jesus Christ’ according to the goodness of God are accomplished through the grace of the Spirit?... First, he is joined to the very flesh of the Lord as his anointing, and he is inseparably present to him, as it is written, “The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and remaining on him, he is my Son, my beloved” (Jn 1:33; Lk 3:22). And, “Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38).²⁹

According to Basil, the inseparable works of God also testify to the noticeably distinct three persons as acts of order. When describing the Spirit as third in the Trinity, Basil condemns the conclusion that the Spirit is subordinate to the Son or the Father.³⁰ In the same way that the Son would not be described as a subordinate person to the Father, and consequently lowering his stature within the Trinity, neither should this rule apply to

²⁶ Basil, *Spir*, 11.27.

²⁷ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 217.

²⁸ Basil, *Spir*, 16.38.

²⁹ Basil, *Spir*, 16.39.

³⁰ Basil, *Spir*, 17.43.

the Spirit. Rather, he observes that this description of Trinitarian order simply further displays Trinitarian relations. Therefore, when one understands God is Triune one is simply understanding God as he is. For in Basil's thought, the divine names, "Father," "Son," and "Spirit," reveal in themselves that God exists in three persons of unified being, glory, honor, and authority when he asserts "through the holy names, he gave the knowledge of the faith that leads to salvation."³¹

Basil demonstrates that the person of the Spirit can be distinctly observed in the inseparable works of God on account of the biblical witness. Additionally, he affirms that the Spirit's mention as third in the Godhead is not a description of his essence, but rather further distinguishes him within the Trinity as the one who accomplishes the Father's will through the Son. Additionally, for Basil the Spirit is a person that is identifiable both in Scripture and experience as the person within the Godhead that is nearest to the believer.

Augustine's "On the Trinity"

For Augustine, the starting point for Trinitarian understanding is faith.³² Faith and reason walk together in his theological reflection. And since faith in God makes one fit to know God, Augustine embarks on a rigorous succession of evaluations to explain the nature of the Godhead, its persons, and innerworkings. At all times, Augustine is hinging his logic on biblical texts, citing text after text explaining the concepts repeated in them, and demonstrating that Scripture offers a particular grammar concerning God.³³ Augustine's genius in observing the relationship between various biblical texts displays an inside out hermeneutical approach, where constructs are organically explained from within the Scriptures themselves. With this approach he establishes interpretive rules

³¹ Basil, *Spir*, 18.44.

³² Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 65.

³³ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 65.

represented in the biblical texts, facilitating the reader's comprehension of God's Triune existence.

For example, Augustine carefully employs the distinction between affirming that "God is," reflecting a statement of God's essence which is common to the three persons, and affirming that "God subsists," reflecting a statement about God's subsisting relations which are different for the persons.³⁴ In describing the unique relation of the Spirit with both the Father and the Son, Augustine clarifies,

It is not without point that in this Triad only the Son is called the Word of God, and only the Holy Spirit is called the gift of God, and only the Father is called the one from whom the Word is born [begotten] and from whom the Holy Spirit principally proceeds. I have added "principally," because we have found that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son. But this too was given the Son by the Father—not given to him when he already existed and did not yet have it; but whatever the Father gave to his only-begotten Word he gave by begetting him. He so begot him then that their common gift would proceed from him too, and the Holy Spirit would be the Spirit of them both.³⁵

Augustine explores the distinctions between substances and persons with more precision than previous examples. Simply, he explores this distinction through affirming the unity of God in regards to substance, while affirming the distinctions of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in regards to non-essential relations.³⁶ By conceding that God's attributes are common to all three persons, Augustine develops a proper language to explain God's Triune persons in distinction from the essential qualities of his being. In simple terms, Augustine's categories give permission to speak about God as a what and a who: what is God inquires of his essential attributes, divine, holy, love; who is God inquires of his relative persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.³⁷

As an example, the titles revealed in Scripture of the divine persons as Father,

³⁴ Christopher R. J. Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 65-67.

³⁵ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.17/29.

³⁶ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 376-7.

³⁷ Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, 60-63.

Son, and Spirit are given to demonstrate their existence relative to one another, not to describe what God is essentially. It is his concern to speak of the persons properly that pushes Augustine to develop categories for reading Scripture with guiding rules for interpretation, such as:

Some things are said with reference to something else, like Father with reference to Son and Son with reference to Father... since the Father is only called so because he has a Son, and the Son is only called so because he has a Father, these things are not said substance wise, as neither is said with reference to itself but only with reference to the other.³⁸

This interpretive rule allows Augustine to recognize the eternal relations of the divine persons, as the Son and the Spirit find their point of origin in the Father, because God always is Triune.³⁹ For Augustine, then, relational language is not fit to describe substance. Rather, he observes the important nuance that Scripture describes God in essential terms at points, and in relational terms elsewhere. In reference to the Holy Spirit, then, Augustine's interpretive rule helpfully supplies a further category to recognize the Spirit's distinct person as one who subsists eternally from the Father and the Son.

Synthesis

The development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's personhood is primarily one of clarification and explanation. The biblical text already presented the doctrine conceptually, needing only to be exposed through synthesis. These Pro-Nicene theologians significantly advance this discussion by repeatedly rooting their arguments in specific biblical texts and biblical language. So, they do not engage their task primarily aiming to prove that the Spirit is a person, as if engaged in an intercollegiate argument between Greek philosophers and Christians. Rather, they aim to explain and relate the

³⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.4/6.

³⁹ Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, 67-70.

biblical data to offer a clear systematic synthesis of its contents precisely because it is the theologians' task to teach Scripture.

As a historian, Lewis Ayres suggests two significant practices among Pro-Nicene theologians signal the distinctly theological impulses that permeated the discourse of these ancient Christians. The persistence to favor Scriptural language when conveying theological reflection, deriving concepts from explicitly biblical terms whenever possible; and the goal to relate ideas and categories of Christian theology to the mind of a broad and non-literate readership.⁴⁰ It is both the demand from Scripture to be handled with particular care, and an ecclesial impulse to shepherd God's flock that drove these theologians to argue as they did.

Therefore, the Trinitarian debates that engulfed the fourth century came from a fundamental ecclesial imperative to uphold Scripture's teaching in the life of the church. Trinitarian rules for the doctrine of God, such as God's unity, inseparable operations and appropriations, and divine simplicity demonstrate a careful application of human language that accurately describes the God revealed in the Scriptures.⁴¹ For example, "... in pro-Nicene texts the primary function of discussing God's simplicity is to set the conditions for all talk of God as Trinity and of the relations between the divine persons, to shape the judgments that we make in speaking analogically, not to offer a description of divine being taken to be fully comprehensible."⁴² These doctrines merely reflect what is observed in biblical texts, and the struggle to convey exegetical conclusions in the context of debate systematically improved and clarified the language employed for these doctrinal categories. As exemplified above, the personhood of the Holy Spirit is one significant discussion within a broader dialogue of Pro-Nicene theologians affirming the

⁴⁰ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 278.

⁴¹ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 3.

⁴² Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 287.

Trinity as displayed in Scripture. They do not claim to be original in their judgments, but rather seek to defend and confess biblical teaching as testified since the apostles.

Medieval Witness

Thus far, this treatment of the Holy Spirit's person has rightly recognized his divine essence and clarified unique identity. The Spirit is God, and simultaneously distinct from the Father and the Son, as he exists in an inseparable relation of origin from the other two. Therefore, it is proper to identify the Spirit as a person. However, one is left to presume that any being may be considered a person in so far as he can be identified and distinguished from other persons in one being.

The unique challenge of this exercise is given to its attempt to explain persons that are divine, and then to turn its attention to persons that are created. Yet, these early theologians deemed this exploration necessary at least in part precisely because of the temptation to misunderstand the Triune God through application of human terms. Briefly, then, this section compares and evaluates the practice of medieval theologians in developing the concept of personhood as it concerns the Trinity. Two figures significantly shape the discussion of personhood in the Medieval period, Boethius and Thomas Aquinas. Their contributions are asymmetrical, however. While Boethius offers a clear and specific definition for personhood, Thomas unfolds it through several implications in his *Summa Theologiae* and biblical commentaries.

Firstly, in Boethius' "On the Trinity," he argues that since God is one, "there is no difference, no plurality arising out of difference" in himself.⁴³ Therefore, the divine relations between Father, Son, and Spirit are not substantial distinctions in God, but rather the divine persons bear differences from each other in relation to one another. His view is summarized as "the substance preserves the unity, the relation makes up the

⁴³ Boethius cited in John Marenbon, *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 110.

Trinity.”⁴⁴ Not unlike Augustine, but with greater forcefulness, Boethius argues for a strong distinction between substance and persons in order to preserve the unity of God and the distinctions of Father, Son, Holy Spirit. In this affirmation, he is not primarily concerned with compromising God’s divinity, but rather he speaks of God’s personhood in a qualified manner that is predicated on God’s nature. Boethius would confess, then, that the Trinity is a plurality of persons that exist in the one being.

Elsewhere, he offers the definition that marks medieval theology: a person is “an individual substance of a nature endowed with reason.”⁴⁵ Through this definition, Boethius adds the category of “nature endowed with reason” as a further qualification for understanding a person. He is concerned that some may presume a plurality of natures, as in the incarnate Son, would demand a plurality of persons. However, having predicated the substance of the Son as common to the Trinity, and that the incarnation does not change the Son’s divine substance, he can maintain that the one substance can exist as three persons.⁴⁶ Boethius’ chief contribution to a theological treatment of personhood, however, is in that his definition can equally apply for God, human beings, and celestial beings.

Developing Boethius’ definition, Thomas explores its application as it relates to speech about God. Much can be explored at this stage, but one clarification that Thomas brings to Boethius’ definition of a person is a defense of its use in application to God when used analogously. Thomas presses the need to speak of the persons relatively, because “every word that refers to the persons signifies relation. But no word belongs to person more strictly than the very word person itself. Therefore this word person signifies

⁴⁴ Marenbon, *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, 110.

⁴⁵ Boethius, 3.171-172, cited in John Marenbon, *Boethius*, Great Medieval Thinkers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 72.

⁴⁶ Marenbon, *Boethius*, 70-72.

relation.”⁴⁷ Thomas equates persons and relations; the divine relations ought to be understood as the persons themselves. “Since relation, considered as really existing in God, is the divine essence itself, and the essence is the same as person... relation must necessarily be the same as person.”⁴⁸

This principle is exemplified in Thomas’ treatment of the person of the Spirit. As Christopher R.J. Holmes notes, Thomas’ explanation of the Spirit’s personhood focuses on at least three descriptions: “1) the Spirit’s procession (origin) in God; 2) ‘the role of relation in grasping the meaning of a person’; 3) and that ‘the divine processions are in the identity of the same nature.’”⁴⁹ The Spirit’s procession is significant because it locates the Spirit’s origin in the Father eternally, and simultaneously identifies a specific function of the Spirit that is not true of the Father. Thomas precisely affirms that the Spirit is the procession of the Father’s will. Further, while procession displays the Spirit’s origin, it also demonstrates that there is a real interaction between Father, Son, and Spirit through procession. Lastly, speaking of the persons as subsistent relations emphasizes both the unity and real relations in the life of God. In other words, while previous theologians held the unity of God and plurality of persons as a concept in tension, Thomas envisions this dynamic as a harmony of being. Thomas simply acknowledges that this one being exists in three relational realities.

The benefit these medieval theologians contribute to the development of personhood is undeniable. However, a few difficulties arise with these arguments as it relates to the application of personhood to God. Firstly, Boethius’ lack of direct engagement with texts of Scripture seems to distance him somewhat from the tradition that precedes him. Especially considering the emphasis in the fourth century to employ

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Summa Theologica* 1. q. 29, a. 3.

⁴⁸ Thomas, *Summa Theologica* 1, q. 40, a. 1.

⁴⁹ Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, 100-103.

biblical language as methodological warrant for one's arguments. It is quite possible that a mere contextual and historical separation from his predecessors would free him from sharing this impulse. But it further explains the necessity for Thomas and others to explore the implications from Boethius's work and clarify him where needed. Lastly, the accusation that Thomas only briefly answers, that this mature definition of a person applies human characteristics back to God, needs to be further explored.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to demonstrate that while the notion of personhood is a developing category in the theology of the church, the affirmation of the Holy Spirit's personhood in particular was rightly deduced by the early church's reflection on the testimony of Scripture, generating fundamental categories through which personhood can be understood broadly. It explored the history leading toward convoluted definitions of the concept of a person, culminating in the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century. In these debates the church regained valuable clarity on the subject, as it defended the unity of God and distinction of the Spirit exemplified by Athanasius, Basil, and Augustine. Additionally, these theologians creatively considered fresh approaches to describe what they observed in Scripture as it relates to personhood broadly, specifically in identifying the person of the Spirit within his divine essence and eternal relations. A brief evaluation of medieval theologians Boethius and Thomas positively highlighted the maturation of the term "person" in that period, but was unconvinced that it offered a better solution than its predecessors in regard to defending the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Finally, this chapter established the foundational principles to explore personhood in relation to essence as it demonstrated that both categories must be explained to properly understand the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 2
ESSENTIALLY EMBODIED: THE BODY
IN RELATIONSHIP TO HUMAN
PERSONHOOD

The significance of human bodies is profoundly affirmed by the apostle John’s exhortation: “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (1 John 4:2). Although attitudes toward human embodiment have varied through the centuries, human beings have always existed in relation to their bodies. Man’s embodied condition, then, must be taken in consideration when articulating the nuance of human personhood. While the previous chapter explored personhood in relation to divine essence and nature, this chapter contends that the body is the proper state of human existence, and therefore an essential qualification for human personhood.¹ Namely, a defining characteristic of human personhood is expressed in embodiment.

The essentiality of embodiment to human nature is a remarkably contested issue.² But the body’s relationship to personhood, even while complex, necessarily centers this immediate discussion. Therefore, this chapter will first demonstrate that a historically negative portrayal of the human body contributes to a disconnect between bodies and persons. Secondly, a brief biblical theology of embodiment will posit that God intends image bearers to exist as embodied creatures, and therefore human beings cannot

¹ Gregg Allison in *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 16. The phrase, “proper state of human existence” is coined by Dr. Gregg Allison.

² Justin E. H. Smith, *Embodiment: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-15. Smith carefully details in his introductory survey that embodiment is contested at a philosophical, theological, and scientific level

be properly defined apart from their embodied materiality. And thirdly, Athanasius of Alexandria's "On the Incarnation" confirms that embodiment is the proper existence for mankind because of the Son's advent in a human body. Therefore, embodiment is essential to human nature, and coextensive to it, human personhood is distinctly expressed through embodied existence.

Negative Attitudes Toward the Body

History has bent toward skepticism when describing the human body. Particularly, a long-lasting trajectory of thought demonstrates that human beings ought to be skeptical of their bodies' natural and functional goodness. The early and modern church, while confessing the goodness of creation in affirmation of Scripture's witness, often portrays the human body with a degree of suspicion.³ History demonstrates a pattern where human beings will seek to define themselves apart from their bodies when taught to view their bodies through a negative lens. This section briefly surveys a few common themes negatively attributed to the human body. It explains that the overwhelming consensus in history is that embodiment is a problem to be resolved. And concludes that this attitude dissociates man's embodied nature from human personhood.

What one ought to make of one's body is a persistent question throughout the centuries. A common account in various ancient traditions for embodied materiality attributes its origin to some version of a fall narrative.⁴ Namely, this present physical existence is the consequence of cosmic disobedience, resulting in a functional separation from a previously superior and immaterial life. Material bodies, then, are a regrettable condition of creatures that have rejected a superior celestial or divine existence. Further,

³ Allison, *Embodied*, 27-29. The implications of this claim can be observed in the spectrum of examples ranging from Origen's self-mutilation of his genitalia, C.S. Lewis' quip that embodiment is a joke, to the innocent Western hymn Fly Away, "like a bird from these prison bars has flown, I'll fly away."

⁴ Justin E. H. Smith, Introduction to *Embodiment: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2-3.

potential incongruences between one's outer and inner life highlight the challenge when explaining purpose in the human body.⁵ For example, one's estimation of intelligence, beauty, and virtue, cannot be accurately portrayed merely through one's body. Physical appearance even has the capacity to deceive others from a person's true character and moral identity. Generally, Western thought cultivated a view of the body that is simply the first step through which a person can discover who they truly are.⁶ In this framework, the body does not speak something ultimate or definitive about a person but remains a necessary conduit to those realities. Therefore, the deeper sense of who a person really is exists outside of their body and is only revealed by an arduous, contemplative, and occasionally divinely aided inward search through their body, and beyond their body. As the examples above display, the seeming givenness of embodiment is commonly approached with discontentment, demanding answers for a more satisfying sense of identity elsewhere.

Even Basil of Caesarea, the great Cappadocian Church Father of the fourth century already highlighted in chapter 1, exhibits some of these common attitudes toward embodiment. His specific treatment of this issue shows that these attitudes toward the body are widespread across Western history, and do not find an exception in church history. While he defends the original goodness of creation, his own imaginary regarding human bodies appears predisposed to associate them to the fall rather than to human purpose, identity, and destiny. Ultimately, it is his instrumental approach toward the body that disassociates it from human persons and results in its association with fallen creation.⁷ This view of the body as a vehicle carried by man is incapable to account for

⁵ Smith, "Introduction," 5-6.

⁶ Timothy C. Tennent, *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 15-18. Tennent further argues that this devaluation of the body over against the true inner self is ultimately a fragmentation between body and spirit, and primarily a gnostic impulse than a Christian one.

⁷ Nonna Verna Harrison, Introduction to *On The Human Condition: St Basil the Great*

intrinsic relation between bodies and human personhood.

In his two-part discourse, “On the Origin of Humanity,” Basil is overwhelmingly positive in describing the creation of human beings, pointing out the necessity to marvel at God’s intentional and special creation of mankind.⁸ “... [We] are satisfied to know the sky rather than ourselves. Do not despise the wonder that is in you... From this small work of construction, I understand the great Fashioner.”⁹ While interacting with the text in Genesis 1:26-27, Basil draws attention to the deliberate intention of God in creating man, demonstrating the tremendous honor assigned to mankind as God’s masterpiece. Moreover, Basil affirms even the singular worth of every unique body, as something that “is quite worthy to be entirely molded by [God’s] hands.”¹⁰ The honor held by human bodies is remarkably visible in the biblical language that describes how the Creator intimately held every human body that he “took,” “made,” and “molded” (Genesis 1:27, 2:7). Mankind, in its embodied existence, is intended to be an overwhelming display of the glory of God in Creation.

Yet, Basil repeatedly treats the body as the most obvious part of human nature that connects man to his fallenness.¹¹ The transitory, corruptible, and perishable nature of the body are areas of persistent emphasis in his account. The natural changes in the body through age, susceptibility to physical and aesthetic deformations, and subsequent decay and death, contribute to an attitude that necessarily concludes embodiment is problematic.¹² Here is a haunting example that even a consistent and influential

(Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 2005), 18-19.

⁸ Basil of Caesarea, “On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 1” in *On The Human Condition: St Basil the Great*. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 2005), 1.2-4

⁹ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.2.

¹⁰ Basil, *On the Origin*, 2.2-3.

¹¹ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.5-7.

¹² Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.6.

contributor toward Pro-Nicene Trinitarianism can offer a poor reflection of the nature and function of human bodies.

Basil's primary struggle is in explaining how man can bear the image of God, as described in his guiding text of Genesis 1:26-27, when his embodied form changes so consistently throughout life.¹³ The challenge of ascertaining the locus of divine image in man is felt precisely because God and man are distinguished in nature. Basil warns, "God is without structure and simple. Do not imagine a shape in regard to him."¹⁴ Therefore, Basil wrestles with the biblical claim by speculating that while the body cannot reflect the divine image, man's reason can.¹⁵ He contends,

Let us learn the things concerning God and understand those concerning ourselves, that we do not have that which is according to the image [of God] in our bodily shape. For the shape of a body is corruptible. The incorruptible is not depicted in the corruptible, nor is the corruptible an image of the incorruptible... How then can what is changing be like the unchanging?... In the superiority of reason. What is lacking in strength of body is encompassed by the employment of reason."¹⁶

Basil centers his reasoning around the corruptibility of the body, leading him to derive a sense of personal identity that transcends embodiment. He continues to develop this argument through the principle of an inner and outer man visible in 2 Corinthians 4:16. "[Genesis] says that the human being is according to the image of God, but the rational part is the human being... I recognize two human beings, one the sense-perceptible, and one hidden under the sense-perceptible, invisible, the inner human."¹⁷ He is not concluding that a human being has two persons, but he is affirming that the truest, most noble part of a human being is his inner self and not his physical self. His concluding remark ultimately completely disassociates his inner identity from his

¹³ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.5-7.

¹⁴ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.5.

¹⁵ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.6.

¹⁶ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.6.

¹⁷ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.7.

outward existence, “For I am what concerns the inner human being, the outer things are not me but mine... the body is an instrument of the human being, an instrument of the soul, and the human being is principally the soul in itself.”¹⁸ Basil carries the legacy that tends to construe human identity content to discredit the significance of embodiment.

But lost in a broader discussion of personhood, through myriads of debates concerning personality, disposition, and inner psychology, is the simple affirmation that it is the uniqueness of every human body that distinguishes one person from another. History’s functional denial of the body as a fundamental component to human personhood extrapolates the divide between material and immaterial aspects of our nature. However, a human person is most naturally understood in that which contains and expresses it, namely, individual bodies. Ultimately, the body is “not merely a biological category but supremely a theological category,” and therefore, a deeper awareness of God’s purposes for the human body must be accounted.¹⁹

A Biblical Theology of Embodiment

In the biblical narrative, before God made mankind, the universe was made for mankind. And in the culmination of history, the universe will be prepared for mankind to live and flourish alongside the reign of an embodied Savior, just as God intended from the beginning. From beginning to end, the biblical storyline cultivates the expectation that embodied human beings will fill the earth and the New Earth. Embodiment, in this sense, is defined simply by the fact that we exist in bodies and cannot exist in this life apart from embodied realities.²⁰ While death separates human beings from their bodies temporarily, human existence continues incomplete until the reuniting of body and soul in the final resurrection. Therefore, God’s creational and eschatological intentions validates

¹⁸ Basil, *On the Origin*, 1.7.

¹⁹ Tennent, *For the Body*, 14.

²⁰ Allison, *Embodied*, 16.

the original goodness and complete redemption of human bodies. This section seeks to affirm the goodness of the body as a visible display of human personhood, while simultaneously granting the composite nature of human beings as both physical and spiritual. In other words, a human being's personhood is necessarily and intricately associated with the body.

Embodied Origin

The biblical storyline envisions humanity as embodied beings nearly exclusively. Mankind is created and redeemed as embodied persons in God's world. While composed of material and immaterial parts – body and soul, physical and cognitive – the trajectory of biblical narrative indicates that it is inconceivable to imagine a complete human being apart from his created body.²¹

Before man is created, God prepares the world for a properly human existence.²² The announcement of Adam and Eve's creation in Genesis 1 is preceded by a functioning world. Skies are filled with stars and birds; the earth and seas are filled by animals and vegetation (Genesis 1:1-24). The Creator speaks the cosmos into a habitable space. What starts as formless and void (1:2), is finally presented as a universe beautiful in form and filled with teeming life (1:24-25).

Mankind is created, then, as the apex of this biblical narrative. The divine deliberation, "Let us make man" (1:26), abruptly interrupts the parallel succession of days one through six, indicating that the creation of man stands out uniquely within the broader creation narrative.²³ God plans to create a being more like him than any other being; unlike the rest of creation, man is made in God's image and likeness.

²¹ Tennent, *For the Body*, 14.

²² Allison, *Embodied*, 33-36.

²³ This section is reflective of Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 48-52. See also Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 56-62.

Subsequently, mankind comes into existence in plurality and distinction as male and female (1:27). Image bearers are created from the beginning as a “them,” uniquely demonstrating that the gendered distinctions of maleness and femaleness are equally necessary in God’s “very good” world. God’s embodied image bearers, then, are intentionally gender specific. Finally, the first man and woman are charged by divine mandate and blessing to build civilization and flourish through procreation and vocation (1:28). The commands “be fruitful and multiply” and “fill the earth and subdue it” highlight the physical orientation of human life in accordance to divine decree. Human life is necessarily physical for God’s creational mandate to be fulfilled. Mankind is gifted and entrusted with all that is made so that, as man and woman bearing the likeness of their Creator, they together participate in the enjoyment and cultivation of Creation (1:29-30). This narrative culminates with the concluding affirmation of God’s “very good” work in making Creation (1:31).

Additionally, man is created as a dependent creature. God originates man’s formation as a being that is made in His own image. Unlike the rest of creation, man is created after a design, namely, in the likeness of God.²⁴ Mankind owes its origin to God as all other created beings, he exists in a unique relationship to God as the only being in Creation molded as a someone that bears resemblance to its Creator. Man is dependent in that his design is based after a model beyond himself. Moreover, man’s dependence is highlighted in God’s refashioning of what is already created to mold the first man and woman. Adam is associated with the dust of the earth and Eve with Adam’s rib. God refashions the ground and man’s rib, demonstrating mankind’s perpetual relationship to Creation, each other, and their Maker (Genesis 2:7, 22). Mankind is never self-originated. Our first parents were purposefully shaped and molded by their divine Creator, and every

²⁴ John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 23-25.

other human since continues to be shaped and molded by their Creator in a dependent relation to their parents. John W. Kleinig describes this relationship of dependence as a physical demarcation of order in the cosmos.²⁵ He explains, “the human body has its own allotted place and receives its proper function in that [created] cosmic order, its God-given ecosystem. The human body depends on [Creation] for its survival and exercises dominion on earth.”²⁶

As a secondary concern, man’s immaterial quality is attested throughout Scripture but is not easily identifiable in the Creation account. As a composite creature, man is both physical and spiritual, body and soul. Jesus affirms that body and soul have a unified destiny in judgment (Matthew 10:28). The apostle Paul also recognizes a duality in man distinguished as the “outer self” that experiences the decaying effects of sin during this life, and the “inner self” that is progressively renewed spiritually (2 Corinthians 4:16). The Creation narrative showcases man in direct relationship with God – who is a spiritual being in physical proximity to Adam and Eve in the Garden – inferring at least an association between physical and spiritual realities. Some have identified the creation of man’s soul partially to the breath of God imparted to Adam in Genesis 2:7.²⁷ However, this event more naturally displays the spark of life which energizes the vivification of man’s clay formed body.²⁸ Yet, man is formed as a whole living person, not as independent parts coexisting together. In one sense, man is simultaneously an embodied soul and an ensouled body, without an obvious priority to either category.²⁹

²⁵ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 24.

²⁶ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 24.

²⁷ Allison, *Embodied*, 44.

²⁸ Allison, *Embodied*, 44. The Creation narrative also illustrates this idea through the “breath” that is shared in all other living creatures.

²⁹ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 32-35.

Both the spiritual and physical appear to seamlessly coexist without sharp distinction in the creation of man. However, the body bears a visibility function in man's identity, locating in it the most obvious lamppost of God's image. All Creation can visibly point to a human being and find in that person a living icon that resembles the Creator. No other part of creation bears that unique revelatory characteristic, as Kleinig affirms,

The whole human being as a soul, a living person, with a human body and a human mind, was designed by the living God to reveal himself—however partially and imperfectly—in the person's life on earth. The body of each person was made for theophany, for God's human manifestation on earth, the visible disclosure of his glory in human terms. That is what human bodies were designed to do and what they have failed to do ever since the rebellion of our primordial parents (Rom 3:23).³⁰

As an embodied display of God's glory, man bears the imprint of the Creator both in form and function. The preparation of the cosmos summarized in chapter 1 is recapitulated in anthropological focus in chapter 2. Genesis 2 locates mankind's placement in the Garden of Eden, at the center of the universe, under commission to enrich the entirety of the world with the flourishing life surrounding him (2:8-17). The formation and commissioning of Adam and Eve are clarified in this narrative, demonstrating performative characteristics that embody the divine image in them both.³¹ For example, Adam is commanded to work and keep the Garden (2:15), given companions not fit for him and wife suited from him (2:18, 22), entrusted with authority to name creatures (2:19-20), and celebrates the unique relational union he is given through his wife (2:23-24). While not an exhaustive list, these examples mirror the work God initiates and completes in Creation (2:1-2), the plurality of the Triune God highlighted in the participation of the Spirit and the Son in Creation (1:2, 26), the verbal authority of God's words in speaking Creation into existence and naming its particular

³⁰ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 29.

³¹ Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 62-63. Lints argues that the divine image refracts the natural light of the Creator upon Creation through the works of mankind.

parts, and the satisfaction in God's completion of his "very good" cosmos (1:31). From beginning to end, the creation account testifies to the natural goodness of the material world, and the physical orientation of human life as part of God's design for men and women in relationship to him.

Temporary State

The introduction of sin and death in Genesis 3 creates a new dynamic in man's embodied existence. A man formed as a unified body and soul, through the event of death, now can experience a temporary disembodied existence. The curse laid upon Adam and Eve and their descendants, while multifaceted, includes a temporary exile from the physicality of life anticipated in the Creation account. Therefore, death separates man's soul from the body. Moreover, death marks an interruption from the creational ideal and the goodness of God's physical world.

While life goes on after death, man's disembodied existence is not the conclusion of his destiny, and Scripture's language about this future cultivates present expectations for human beings.³² The original intent for embodiment is eventually realized in the final resurrection. Nevertheless, this disembodied state signifies either a heavenly awaiting in the presence of God in heaven, or a present and conscious torment in hell until the final judgment.³³ Moreover, for the believer, there is a sense of gain in death that occurs when entering the presence of Christ (Philippians 1:21-23). However, death is not an escape from an imprisoned embodied existence. Rather, it is simply the transition from corruptibility to incorruptibility, from living in the presence of sin's reality to a reality where sin is an impossibility. This conclusion also does not favor the

³² Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are: A Christian Understanding of Identity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2018), 209-215. Snodgrass notes Scripture uses language of the future to challenge the Christian's imagination for purposeful living in the present.

³³ Allison, *Embodied*, 240-244. Dr. Gregg Allison further expands that expectation of this transitional period ought not to primarily create fear in the Christian, but a greater urgency for preparedness.

immateriality of man over his materiality. While the apostle Paul acknowledges that a believer who is away from his body is present with the Lord, he also admits that redemption is incomplete until the reuniting of the soul and body in the New Heavens and New Earth (2 Corinthians 5:6-8, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). Life continues after death, but the final stage of redemption is the redemption of the body. Indeed, human beings groan alongside death-plagued Creation, “as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).³⁴

Until the resurrection, death remains a testament of the yet-to-be redeemed nature of this life.³⁵ Death is unavoidable in this life because it is still awaiting the return of Jesus and the redemption of all things, when “he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11). Indeed, Scripture indicates that both angels and saints in heaven maintain an earth-bound orientation awaiting the completion of God’s redemption. 1 Peter specifically addresses angels “peering into the mystery” of God’s unfolding plan. And Revelation describes martyred saints in heaven awaiting the redemption and justice that will come to pass through God’s judgments (Revelation 5:7-8; 8:1-4). Even this intermediate state, then, maintains an anticipation that history is incomplete until a new Eden breaks in this world filled by God’s redeemed and embodied image bearers. Paul concludes that this temporary existence of disembodiment is equivalent to being “naked” or “unclothed,” and therefore awaits remedying (2 Corinthians 5:1-9).³⁶ A disembodied existence, then, is simply an intermediate and temporary one that longs for its next chapter in life’s story. Death and the intermediate state testify that the proper state of human beings is embodiment.

³⁴ Expanded in Allison, *Embodied*, 249-252.

³⁵ Allison, *Embodied*, 256-257.

³⁶ Allison, *Embodied*, 34.

Athanasius' "On the Incarnation"

Similarly, Church Father Athanasius of Alexandria contends the incarnation of the Son of God reveals that embodiment is the proper state of humanity. Athanasius "On the Incarnation" illustrates the church's persistence in striving to reaffirm the goodness of creation. Here, Athanasius bases this affirmation on the grounds that God seeks to redeem the world through the incarnation of the Son. In Athanasius' estimation, the incarnation validates God's intentions for creation, and simultaneously demonstrates humanity's destiny to exist as embodied beings in the likeness of Jesus. Therefore, this section further illustrates the coherence in recognizing human persons in relation to their embodied nature.

Athanasius' chief concern is to demonstrate that salvation is an embodied experience as demonstrated through the incarnate Son of God. Namely, the incarnation is driven by "love for humankind and goodness of his own Father he appeared to us in a human body for our salvation."³⁷ So, comparable to the treatment above, Athanasius also employs a biblical theological approach to demonstrate that embodiment is the proper state of human existence because of the person and work of Christ. But Athanasius also uniquely approaches this subject by grounding it in the historicity of the Son's advent. Athanasius locates the life and person of Christ as the objective reality that demands a verdict. Therefore, having already offered an account for the beginning and ending of embodied existence, Athanasius here suggests an unabstracted model of apprehending the same truth. Again, the proper state of human existence is embodiment because the person and work of Christ testify it must be so. As John Behr explains,

Athanasius characterizes the proper state of human existence from the view of what has been revealed by Christ in his work of salvation: human beings were created for communion with God through contemplation of his Word and Image, the Savior Jesus Christ... Athanasius' analysis is more concerned to determine in light of Christ, what is the proper characteristic or state of human existence, in contrast to

³⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, "On the Incarnation," in *Saint Athanasius, On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 2012), 1.

what we have actually seen throughout history, rather than to speculate about primordial beginnings.³⁸

Athanasius argument is framed around two organizing dilemmas: “The Divine Dilemma regarding Life and Death,” and “The Divine Dilemma regarding Knowledge and Ignorance.”³⁹ Firstly, if God is a good Creator, why would he allow Creation to succumb under sin? And secondly, given the condition of man under sin, how could he come to know God? Embracing the storyline of Scripture, these two questions set the framework for Athanasius’ demonstration that embodiment is the proper state of human existence.

The first question he posits is answered through at least two resolutions: the purpose of Creation is to demonstrate God’s nature; and the character of God will ensure he will enact his purposes. Athanasius contends that God created the cosmos in a particular order and frame to demonstrate something about himself, namely, that he is good, ordered, and powerful. Human beings, then, are part of that creational design. Yet, the special care God invests in the creation of humans is one of Athanasius’ proofs as to why the Son of God became incarnate. Human beings are created uniquely as embodied image bearers, and their impending redemption is anticipated precisely because divine revelation highlights God’s special attention to their creation. “For we were the purpose of his embodiment, and for our salvation he so loved human beings as to come to be and appear in a human body.”⁴⁰ The intended good of creation, and God’s own love, demand that the incarnation of the Son is the necessary means to address the problem introduced by sin. “It was therefore right not to permit human beings to be carried away by corruption, because this would be improper to and unworthy of the goodness of God.”⁴¹

³⁸ John Behr, Introduction to *Saint Athanasius, On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2012), 25.

³⁹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 2, 11.

⁴⁰ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 4.

⁴¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 6.

In other words, in the creation of the cosmos God willingly risks his own reputation. And his character is vindicated in the embodiment of the Son.

The incarnation is the answer to Athanasius' first dilemma because, through it, God himself appears in human form. The embodiment of the Son is God's physical, man-like, reply to this dilemma. The Son's embodiment, then, offers both a continuation and clarification to the dilemma raised by the fall. It is a continuation of the Edenic ideal and God's affirmation of the goodness of the cosmos and his intent to engage in this world through human beings. And it is a clarification that God has not abandoned his creation to the self-destructive results of sin. Commenting on God's resolve to undo the Fall, Athanasius concludes,

... seeing the impropriety in what had happened, that the very things of which he himself was the Creator were disappearing, and seeing the excessive wickedness of human beings, that they gradually increased it to an intolerable pitch against themselves, and seeing the liability of all human beings to death—having mercy upon our race, and having pity upon our weakness, and condescending to our corruption, and not enduring the dominion of death... he takes for himself a body and that not foreign to our own.⁴²

The second dilemma Athanasius surmises is also answered through the incarnation. Given man's condition of sin, having his knowledge and ability to commune with God affected by the Fall, a remedy for this state of separation is needed. "For what profit would there be for those who were made, if they did not know their own Maker?"⁴³ Therefore, the embodiment of the Son introduces a new paradigm of what it means to be alive as an embodied human being. If man's natural condition now is hindered by sin, causing separation between God and man, the Son becomes incarnate to showcase a humanity that is not enslaved by that condition. The incarnation does not recreate humanity as a new type of creature, one that is unlike its kind. Rather, Athanasius argues that the incarnation portrays as well as communicates a humanity that can exist apart

⁴² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 8.

⁴³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 11.

from the corruptibility of sin. The embodiment of the Son offers a living example for humanity, simultaneously revealing and modeling a new paradigm for human beings as a human being himself.

So, rightly wishing to help human beings, he sojourned as a human being, taking to himself a body like theirs and from below—I mean through the works of the body—that those not wishing to know him from his providence and governance of the universe, from the works done through the body might know the Word of God in the body, and though him the Father.⁴⁴

Therefore, the incarnation reveals that Jesus took human senses to bring humanity back to their senses. The embodiment of the Son is the visible manifestation of the knowledge of God, and in this sense, encapsulates the original intent for human beings created to reflect their Maker's likeness.

An important concluding consideration from Athanasius' argument is the implied new relationship to death held by a believer presently. Namely, the death of Christ on one's behalf, and his resurrection into a glorified body, reframes a believer's expectation for how he will face death in his own body. In the practical discussion of his argument, Athanasius addresses Gentiles that are generally unimpressed at a divine Savior that embodies a paradigmatic human life. However, Athanasius argues that since death is an interwoven reality in the universe, uniquely manifested in the body as well as around all of creation, then life needed to sprout from a body and the rest of Creation would lose its corruption as well. "If death was interwoven with the body, and dominated it as if united to it, it was necessary for life to be interwoven with the body, so that the body putting on life should cast off corruption."⁴⁵ The resurrection of the Savior, then, is a signal to believers as well as creation that the corruption of the fall will not linger forever. Therefore, Athanasius encourages believers to face the fear of their own death through metaphor,

⁴⁴ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 14.

⁴⁵ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 44.

And just as straw is naturally destroyed by fire, if anyone keeps the fire away from the straw, the straw does not burn, but remains fully straw, straw fearful of the threat of fire, for fire naturally consumes it. But if someone covers the straw with much asbestos, which is said to be fireproof, the straw no longer fears the fire, having security from the covering of asbestos. In the same way one may talk about the body and about death.⁴⁶

For Athanasius, redemption is an entirely embodied reality. The hope of the cosmos hinges entirely on the resurrected body of Christ, and the resurrection of those who are in him. As an implication from his argument, then, it is necessary to affirm that the incarnation is the paradigm through which Christians translate their own embodied experience. John Behr comments, “The body itself is the focus of Athanasius’ ‘incarnational’ theology; it is to the body that the victory is given, as it is in and through the body, flesh and blood, that the spiritual forces of the devil are conquered. The body is not involved in salvation, but is the locus of salvation, for it is the dwelling place of the Lord.”⁴⁷ Indeed, the humanity of Christ refashions the destiny and identity of the Christian, but it simultaneously never dislocates humanity from its principal embodied origin. Kleinig explains,

... God’s Son now discloses his glory in his human body. His body has now become the place for theophany, the place where God shows his glory to all people, in order to give them access to his grace. Through his human body Jesus shares his own divine life with us; through his human face, as in a mirror, he shows us the face of God the father; through his human mouth and his limbs he speaks the Father’s word to us, both by what he says and by what he does. With his human hands he delivers the Father’s gift to us. He resides with us bodily so that we can receive God’s grace and truth. He is the bodily theophany of the Father (Heb 1:3); by seeing him, we see the Father (John 14:9). In short, he makes God the Father known to us safely in physical human terms.⁴⁸

The work of Christ locates the body as the primary place of redemption. Not primarily by transforming it into something different, but by enabling its truest intention. Athanasius demonstrates that the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the embodied

⁴⁶ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 44.

⁴⁷ Behr, “Introduction,” 43-44.

⁴⁸ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 65.

Savior validate the claim that embodiment is the proper state of human existence.

Coextensively, and directly related to the immediate thesis, the Son's embodied advent demonstrates that the body necessarily exists in relation to personhood. In taking human nature, the divine Son does not become a new person, but expresses his unique personal identity as the Son now visible in a human body. While the Son's incarnation does not indicate a rejection of his divine nature, but rather the addition of a secondary human nature, it is significant to highlight that divine personhood and human personhood are expressed uniquely given the distinction between two natures. Athanasius recognizes the tension derived from acknowledging Jesus' two natures. But while centering the immediate discussion around the necessity for the divine Son's true embodiment of humanity, he affirms that the Son's person is revealed in acts of human nature and divine nature.⁴⁹ It is evident that the Son's advent communicates his personal identity as a being that is fully human and as a being that is fully divine. It is only through the Son's advent, however, that personhood can be categorically qualified in accordance to two natures.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to validate the relationship between embodiment as the proper state of human existence and human personhood as qualified by its essence. It sought to explain the divide between bodies and human personhood within historical attitudes that portrayed embodiment negatively. Highlighted through a biblical theology of man's primordial origins and temporary death, it affirmed that embodiment is God's design for image bearers. It further demonstrated in Athanasius' "On the Incarnation" that human personhood is necessarily related to personal bodies, and that the Son's double nature necessitates a personhood qualified by essence. The following chapter, then, will expand the importance of describing the Son's person in relation to his double nature.

⁴⁹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 17-19.

CHAPTER 3

THE NECESSITY FOR QUALIFICATIONS

This thesis sought to define the distinctions in personhood across distinct essences, divine and human. It defended the terminology of persons in its distinctly Christian usage when articulating the personhood of the Holy Spirit as necessarily conclusive given eternal relations of origin within the Godhead. It further demonstrated that human personhood is directly associated with human embodiment and its created nature. Lastly, this chapter argues that a qualified definition of personhood provides necessary clarity in theological discourse, particularly demonstrated in its ability to explain the paradox of the Son's hypostatic union.

This chapter will first demonstrate that, contra definitions of personhood that source the definition in functional characteristics, a clear categorical distinction between persons and essences is necessary in order not to diminish the relevance of both.¹ Secondly, a nuanced articulation of personhood is dependent on a robust expression of the doctrine of analogy, so what is spoken of God can be done truly through categories that do not restrict him. Analogy demonstrates that the infinite God can use, and in fact uses, categories fashioned in the realm of creation to reveals who he is.² Finally, an evaluation of Gregory of Nazianzus' theological orations will exemplify both the nature

¹ John D Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood." In *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28, no. 5 (1975): 401–447. Zizioulas particularly illustrates the impoverished usage of the term.

² Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 232.

of analogy, and that the distinct personhood of the incarnate Son is revealed in the context of his dual natures and never in isolation from them. Conclusively, then, the Son's eternal relation of origin and human embodiment are necessary qualifications for how one ought to speak of his person.

A Conflated Person and Essence Dictum

As the previous chapters highlighted, proper speech about the nature of God consumed much of church history. But contrary to the discussion about person and essence already established in chapters 1 and 2, the Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan of Pergamon, John D. Zizioulas offers an alternative reading of Scripture's presentation of the Trinity, and of the patristic texts treated above. The treatment below will demonstrate that this suggestion significantly impoverishes a view of personhood that is intended to be complementary to nature and essence as distinctive, and not at odds from it as hierarchical. Simply, unlike the presentations above that emphasizes personhood as a category qualified and informed by essence, Zizioulas contends for a fronting of personhood over substance.³ He affirms this revised definition as,

The person is no longer an adjunct to a being, a category which we *add* to a concrete entity once we have first verified its ontological hypostasis. *It is itself the hypostasis of the being...* from an adjunct to a being the person becomes the being itself and is simultaneously—a most significant point—the *constitutive element* (the 'principle' or "cause") of beings.⁴

Moreover, he polemicizes against the traditional view that claims the unity of God consists of his divine essence. Rather, he concludes that God is first Father, and the other persons are consequentially derivative, in relative terms, from the Father and his essence.⁵ Zizioulas argument is encapsulated in a construct of personhood that is

³ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Press 1997), 39-40.

⁴ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 39

⁵ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 41.

categorically dependent on one's impulse toward communion. It is this impulse that decisively explains the persons in the Godhead, and all persons generally: "it is not in its 'self-existence' but in *communion* that this being is *itself* and thus is *at all*. Thus communion does not threaten personal particularity; it is constitutive of it."⁶ In other words, the true ontology of a being like God is its capacity for personal relation with other persons. "When we say, therefore, that God is, we do not refer to a being as being but to the Father—a term which denotes being in the sense of hypostasis, i.e. of Person."⁷

However, Zizioulas seems to misstep in a few fundamental areas, but chiefly when he centers what is meant by personhood in the capacity for communion. As he correctly warns, a personhood that is merely explained through nature does in fact run the risk of communicating an a-personal being.⁸ However, clarity demands that God's being be explained properly in terms of unity of essence and distinction persons, as I have argued in chapter 1. But more significantly, Zizioulas' privileging of personhood over nature, rather than alongside it, necessarily makes God's personal internal and external activities essential to his nature. "That which makes a particular personal being be itself—and thus be at all—is in the final analysis communion, freedom and love..."⁹ The act of communion, as Zizioulas holds, is essential to God's being, and fundamental for what it means for God to be God. Secondly, when he includes human personhood in this argument, apart from any essential qualifications, he functionally flattens human personhood and divine personhood around the capacity for communion.¹⁰ Rather, I have contended that a central characteristic distinguishing human and divine personhood is the

⁶ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 409 (emphasis in original).

⁷ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 410.

⁸ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 409-10.

⁹ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 410.

¹⁰ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 422-25.

boundary of essential distinction, so that personhood can properly defined in conjunction to essence.

Additionally, when Zizioulas discusses personhood and essence he defines terms in such a way that erases distinction between someone and something.¹¹ This conflation is especially visible in Zizioulas' discussion about the fall of man into sin.¹² Since personhood is primarily an innate impulse toward communion, sin is an act of isolation and introversion.¹³ "Man by his fall chooses to sacrifice his personhood by individualizing his existence in the manner of the division and fragmentation of thinghood."¹⁴ But for Zizioulas, personhood carries such a priority in defining nature that a human person has the potential of pursuing a God-like existence, or ensnaring itself into sin, precisely because of their personhood.¹⁵ He explains,

In creating man as a person God had in mind communion, and freedom was the only way to this. With man's choice to introvert... the ontological difference between Creator and creatures was affirmed as a gap, i.e. not as difference, but as division, and man became enslaved to nature. Freedom led to slavery, but paradoxically enough... it did not disappear.¹⁶

While Zizioulas could have simply affirmed the possibility and functional reality of acting against one's nature, or even contrary to it, he instead conceptualizes the necessary boundary of nature as something flexible in its outworking, therefore subject to become malleable through personal action. A person's nature, then, is subject to his doing. Coextensively, the same principle applies to the inner life of God, where his

¹¹ Further elaborated in Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something.'* trans. by Oliver O'Donovan (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16-33.

¹² Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 428-9.

¹³ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 428-9.

¹⁴ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 428-9.

¹⁵ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 428.

¹⁶ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 429.

attributes become descriptive of his essence.¹⁷

Lastly, by making personhood prior to being, Zizioulas deliberately develops a Trinitarian framework that argues for a way of speaking of the Father essentially that is different from how one ought to speak of the Son or the Spirit. He suggests, “If God exists, He exists because the Father exists, that is, He who out of love freely begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit. Thus God as person—as the hypostasis of the Father—makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God.”¹⁸ This language that attributes to the Father the title of first principle or originator errs by turning a personal quality into an ontological and essential one.¹⁹ He concludes, “What therefore is important in trinitarian theology is that God ‘exists’ on account of a person, the Father, and not on account of a substance.”²⁰ Rather than recognizing personal language as relative, Zizioulas confers ontological definition to titles in respect to the Father, and consequently functionally divides the Trinity.

This discussion highlights the importance of both, a proper use of theological retrieval of past resources within the Christian tradition, and a renewed impetus to repeat the Great Tradition’s commitment to speak properly about the nature and persons of God.²¹ A theology of retrieval then, aims at decentering modern judgments, such as Zizioulas’, by recognizing that “the Christian tradition is cumulative, and its theology

¹⁷ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 46. Zizioulas reckons 1 John 4:16 gives precedent to this conclusion, “love... is *constitutive* of His substance, that is, it is that which makes God what He is, the one God.”

¹⁸ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 41.

¹⁹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 41-2. Zizioulas emphasizes that the priority of Trinitarian theology is to show that God exists, namely in the mode of Father.

²⁰ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 42.

²¹ John Webster, “Theologies of Retrieval,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain R Torrance. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 584

does not start de novo but with ‘classics.’”²² However, the difficulty of using human language to describe theological reality continues to be a challenge regardless of anyone’s vantage point. Therefore, leaning on the past as an attempt to reframe and reorient present discussion is a fitting start for the modern theologian. John Webster commends,

For such theologies [of retrieval], immersion in the texts and habits of thought of earlier (especially pre-modern) theology opens up a wide view of the object of Christian theological reflection, setting before its contemporary practitioners descriptions of the faith unharassed by current anxieties, and enabling a certain liberty in relation to the present.²³

The subsequent section will seek to demonstrate the validity of this approach in reference to speech about God, particularly as it explores the dual nature of the incarnate Son.

Toward A Revised Grammar

While man can know God truly, he can never know God fully. There is a fundamental separation between man as creature, and God as Creator, that transcends the limits of comprehension. So even though God condescends, makes himself known, communes with man as man, that knowledge does not comprise the sum of what it means for God to be God. This section contends that all speech about God, while it can be true, is necessarily analogical in nature.

God is truly immanent and knowable to creation, yet he is also transcendent and unsearchable (Psalm 145:3). Because of this inherent human limitation to divine access, whatever man can say about God is dependent on his ability to reason through divine revelation, namely, God’s own self-disclosure. But even divine revelation is accommodated to the limitations of man, demonstrating God’s use of created concepts to

²² Webster, “Theologies of Retrieval,” 590.

²³ Webster, “Theologies of Retrieval,” 584-5.

unveil his uncreated being.²⁴ John Webster explains,

Revelation is an act of accommodation, by which of his charity God tempers knowledge of himself to finite modes of knowing... It summons created intelligence; it makes possible 'words taught by the Spirit' (1 Cor 2:13); by its gift, it is possible to say without hubris 'we have the mind of Christ' (1 Cor 2:16). God so tempers his knowledge that it assumes fitting created form.²⁵

As Webster articulates, God's self-disclosure is a kindness toward mankind in that the Creator of human minds displays himself in such a way as to make himself ascertainable to the human intellect. The God of all creatures accommodates the knowledge of himself through creaturely terms and concepts so that men may truly know him. This, in brief, is what the doctrine of analogy explores.

Since God's revelation in creaturely terms demands the involvement of human reasoning, the doctrine of analogy affords a conception of the knowledge of God that is simultaneously true while still confessing God's inherent transcendence and unknowability. Stephen Duby recognizes the obvious tension of this doctrine, because to speak of God "necessarily involves using language that human beings customarily apply to themselves and fellow creatures."²⁶ This complication is immediately reflective of the discussion above, since this thesis contends that personhood is a term used to describe God and man. But the doctrine of analogy is needed for precisely these categories, because as Duby prescribes, it is the tool that transcribes genuine knowledge from a transcendent God.²⁷ Namely, analogy is "a similarity that leaves room for significant dissimilarity—that exists between the sense in which our language applies to creatures and the sense in which it applies to God."²⁸ Although God is incomparable and will not

²⁴ John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason*. (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 142.

²⁵ Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 142.

²⁶ Duby, *God in Himself*, 232.

²⁷ Duby, *God in Himself*, 232.

²⁸ Duby, *God in Himself*, 232.

share his glory with another (Isaiah 48:3-11), his self-revelatory acts communicate his nature and character truthfully. Revelation demonstrates God's intentional inclusion of his creatures into a knowing fellowship with divine life.

However, human speech about God will always be a task of approximation followed from relationship. Man speaks of God from a relational knowledge of the self-disclosing Triune God. Yet, the use of analogy to describe God does not imply speech about God is only metaphorical or allegorical. One does not entail the other. Rather, analogical language merely aims to explain what exists in God himself as communicated through his works.²⁹ Alternatively, analogical language confesses that anything said about God never represents his totality simply because God cannot be grasped in his totality. Therefore, analogy conveys what is known and true of God, and it can be utilized as a concrete pedagogical instrument to communicate the incommunicable God.

Retrieving Gregory of Nazianzus

Cappadocian Father in the fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus, models these concerns over theological precision in his own orations about the nature and relations of the Trinity.³⁰ His treatment highlights that speaking about God in a cautious, but precise way, is not a new practice in Christian theology. "The Theologian," Gregory of Nazianzus responds to those who deny that whatever can be said of the Father's nature must also be said of the Son and the Spirit.³¹ And significant for the overall discussion, Gregory models a theological grammar that accounts for what the doctrine of analogy seeks to accomplish. The observations below express a way of talking about God that

²⁹ Duby, *God in Himself*, 286.

³⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 27" in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2002), 1.

³¹ Lionel Wickham, "Background in Historical Theology to the Five Orations" in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2002), 19-20.

properly navigates the interplay between Scripture's affirmations and denials when exploring the nature and persons of the Trinity.

Firstly, he acknowledges that God is essentially unknowable, and human reason is incapable of comprehending all that is in God.³² A driving concern for this series of orations is Gregory's staunch disregard for his opponent's eloquent and clever use of words when reasoning about God.³³ Chiefly, Gregory addresses the arrogant pride in confessing God as a mere subject matter to be debated and eventually grasped. This approach that merely describes God is altogether inappropriate if God in his very nature transcends creaturely distinctions and categories. Gregory strongly affirms, "To know God is hard, to describe him impossible."³⁴ Rather than attempting to explain the knowledge of what God is, Gregory aims to explain the conviction that God does in fact exist.³⁵ Rather than belittling the limitations created by a creature/Creator distinction, Gregory restructures the argument to draw out the knowability of God around God's own self-disclosing initiative. Apart from this communicative reality, reason is required to deduce God's essence through materials that do not share that essence, sharing in the guilt of those Gregory condemns for constricting God around created categories.³⁶ God's divine essence cannot be described in creaturely terms because he is not bound by those creaturely realities³⁷. Rather than God's essential knowledge, God's existence is affirmed in that the unknowable God communicates his own self-existence and attributes in the theater of creation. Revelation, not mere deductive reasoning, is the vehicle through which creatures discover that their Creator is unknowable.

³² Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 2-5.

³³ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 27," 1.

³⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 4.

³⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 5.

³⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 7-8.

³⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 9.

Secondly, he admits that God's incomprehensibility does not prohibit God from revealing himself truly.³⁸ That God is unknowable does not indicate that God is hidden. Gregory argues that it would be against God's nature to keep himself hidden from human inquiry based on God's own creation of man as thinking creatures.³⁹ Gregory does not deny the role of reasoning through revelation, as he himself models. But he recognizes that human reasoning is only properly employed in response to divine initiative, otherwise it veers toward idolatry.⁴⁰ Anything that can be known about God, then, is dependent on God's own self-revelation. While the knowledge of God as he is essentially, in his nature, is necessarily undiscoverable, the actual revelation of this truth claim is unveiled and knowable in the communicative acts of God.⁴¹

Thirdly, he argues that the Son's divine essence can be deduced from his relation of origin within the Godhead.⁴² His personhood, then, is distinct and knowable precisely because of his eternal relation of origin with the Father and the Spirit. While divine essence cannot be deduced, it can be rightly ascribed when revealed. Particularly in the Son, then, his oneness of essence within the Godhead and distinct personhood can both be attested on account of revelation about the Triune life. This issue of origin further illustrates the need to define terms in accordance to a nature that transcends human concepts. Gregory correctly notes that to speak of the Son's origin or begottenness does not refer to an event in time.⁴³ Because at no point does the Father begin to be Father, neither is the Son subject to change by becoming a Son. Rather, Scripture's language is intended to instruct and reveal something true about God, but that nevertheless still needs

³⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 11-12.

³⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 11.

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 12-16.

⁴¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 28," 17.

⁴² Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29," 3.

⁴³ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29," 4.

to be qualified speech particular to God. While these are creaturely terms, they are attributed to God in Scripture as revelation, and to some degree condescension, as illustrated by the doctrine of analogy explained above.

Fourthly, he recognizes the purposeful language that Scripture uses when speaking of Christ, noting that two senses are drawn: one in respect to his human nature, and another in respect of his divine nature. The mistake of Gregory's opponents is in associating biblical claims made about the Son's human nature as correlative to his divine essence, and therefore placing the incarnate Son in a sub-divine substance that is unlike the Father's.⁴⁴ He confronts his opponents' carelessness in treating the divine Son's "incorporeal nature as if it were a body."⁴⁵ Gregory confesses the importance of distinguishing Scripture's language about God between essential descriptions and relative descriptions. For example, God is uncreated, but the Son is begotten.⁴⁶ At times Scripture directly describes the persons of the Godhead in terms that explain their eternal relations of origin, while at other times Scripture simply describes God essentially. Moreover, the names of the divine persons themselves are significant in that they reveal both distinction of essence and unity of essence. Gregory concludes,

"Father" designates neither the substance nor the activity, but the relationship, the manner of being, which holds good between the Father and the Son. Just as with us these names indicate kindred and affinity, so here too they designate the sameness of stock, of parent and offspring.⁴⁷

Lastly, Gregory properly maintains that the personhood of Christ is attested consistently as a two-natured person. At no point is Christ's personhood dependent on any observable characteristics, but is rather consistently described in relationship to his essences. Gregory affirms that Scripture attests repeatedly that Son is a two-natured

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29," 6-8.

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29," 8.

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29," 10-11.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29," 17.

person, fully God and fully man. It is the reader of Scripture that must be astute in his interpretation because the Son is described both through the “more sublime expressions of the Godhead” in his nature that transcends bodily experience, and through the “lowlier expressions” that attest to his incarnation.⁴⁸ Therefore, Gregory models that the need for a proper theological nuance is not proposed as a riddle to resolve, but as a mystery to marvel. The mystery being that “[the Son] remained what he was; what he was not, he assumed.”⁴⁹ Consequently, the Son can be described as a person in the likeness of the Father because they are essentially one. In this sense then, the personhood of the Son is unlike the personhood of human beings who do not share that unifying nature. Nevertheless, the Son through his incarnation can be said to have a truly personal human life because of the fullness of the human nature he assumed. And therefore, the person of the Son in his humanity inescapably includes his embodiment, the visible revelation of his nature to creatures that share in that nature.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to unify the discussions of chapters 1 and 2. In exploring an unqualified description of person and essence, it demonstrated that both those terms become impoverished in their definition and function. It argued that in developing a theology of retrieval and in utilizing the doctrine of analogy, proper speech about God is possible and necessary, particularly as revealed in the incarnate Son’s hypostatic union. Finally, in retrieving Gregory of Nazianzus’ Christology, it validated that person and essence must be explained in qualification of each other. This thesis, then, concludes with the affirmation that persons are qualified by their essence.

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oration 29,” 17-18.

⁴⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oration 29,” 19.

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ABSTRACT

PERSONS ACCORDING TO ESSENCE

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In the classical Christian tradition, personhood is a concept employed to distinguish the members in the Trinity while simultaneously affirming their oneness of being. Yet, this is a term applied to both human beings and God. At minimum a person is a being that exists in defined relations. However, being, essence, or nature, necessarily qualify one's personhood, and should be explained congruently. This preserves creature and Creator distinctions as this anthropological and trinitarian loci intersects.

This project aims to explore the classical arguments that employed personhood language to explain the Trinity and seeks to carefully expand the concept's application to human beings. It will contend that personhood be first understood in reference to God's nature, and secondly to man in reference to his created nature. Lastly, this project will demonstrate that an alternative application of personhood conflates the relationship between person and being. It will conclude that this error impoverishes a definition of God or men as unique persons and diminishes the significance of the two-natured person of Christ.

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