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“THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE”: JOHN GILL’S DOCTRINE
OF CHRIST’S ETERNAL SONSHIP

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“THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE”: JOHN GILL’S DOCTRINE
OF CHRIST’S ETERNAL SONSHIP

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For Candace, my beloved and friend.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325</i>
<i>Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity</i>	<i>A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures.</i> 1839 ed. Reprint, Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989
<i>Exposition of the Old and New Testaments</i>	<i>Exposition of the Old and New Testaments.</i> 1809–1810 ed. Reprint, 9 vols. Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006
<i>PRRD</i>	<i>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725.</i> 2nd ed. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003
<i>A Collection of Sermons and Tracts (1773)</i>	<i>A Collection of Sermons and Tracts.</i> 2 vols. London: George Keith, 1773
<i>Sermons and Tracts (1814–1815)</i>	<i>Sermons and Tracts.</i> 1814 ed. Reprint, 6 vols. Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, 1999
<i>The Doctrine of the Trinity</i>	<i>The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc'd into the Form of a Treatise.</i> 2nd ed. Southwark, England: George Keith, 1752
<i>WJO</i>	<i>The Works of John Owen.</i> Edited by William H. Goold. Reprint, 23 vols. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965

PREFACE

With each advancing step in my theological education I become more thankful for the opportunity to study God's Word and the history of his work in the church. I am truly blessed to have studied under the outstanding faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which God has used to deepen my love for God and his Word. The completion of this dissertation is the capstone of more than eight years of arduous study. Along the way I have been encouraged and blessed by more people than I can mention, though I will do my best to acknowledge those I can.

I am thankful to my fellow students who have convinced me that residential study is the unreplaceable model of theological education. The positive contributions of discussions outside the classroom are invaluable and unquantifiable. Without these discussions, two of the following chapters would have never been conceived. To name but a few of these students for whom I am thankful, are Jared Marshall, "Taco" Tyler Chapman, Corbin Hobbs, Matt Tyler, Jacob Denhollander, and Layne Hancock. Conversations with Jacob directed me towards the topic of chapter four in this dissertation, and Layne Hancock receives credit for convincing me to pursue further study in historical theology and John Gill in particular. I am also grateful for Alex Tibbott, whose friendship for the past three years has been a constant source of godly wisdom and strength. Dr. Tyler Wittman was instrumental in pointing me toward Aquinas and other resources that led to the fifth chapter. I am grateful for his knowledgeable advice. Two men receive special recognition for their contribution to my theological education: Sam Emadi and Colin Smothers. I have often said that these two godly and wise brothers are responsible for a high percentage of my theological education. They continue to be sources of wisdom in my life. Furthermore, two dear

brothers need recognition for their investment in my life: Luke Allison and Matt Bahr. Both of these men have walked with me throughout the PhD and provided much prayer, wisdom, and godly encouragement along the way. They are the church members every church member needs in their life. I would also like to express my gratitude for Dr. Clint Bass, who first instilled in me a love for Baptist theology and history. Without his undergraduate Baptist history course, I never would have pursued this study. He has become an invaluable mentor and friend.

My friend and editor Torey Teer deserves my gratitude for his excellent work. This dissertation has benefited from his consummate professionalism and expertise. I am also grateful to Dr. Gentry, who graciously met with me to discuss Gill's interpretation of the Old Testament. Dr. Wellum was also instrumental and affirming in this project. His classes have been deeply formative to my thinking. I am thankful for his service on the dissertation committee. I owe great thanks to Dr. Wright, whose PhD seminars provided me with a firmer grasp on the Reformed tradition and taught me to be a better writer. Chapter four of this dissertation was written for his Reformed scholasticism seminar. Lastly, I am grateful for Dr. Tom Nettles, who generously gave me his guidance and direction in an independent study on Gill, out of which study came the fifth chapter of this dissertation. Dr. Nettles has continued to be a source of wisdom and inspiration in my life. I am thankful for his service on my dissertation committee.

I cannot express enough thankfulness to my parents, Sharon and Gary, and my brothers Nathan, Ethan, and Stephen, for their constant encouragement, love, and prayer. Their support has carried me through these years of study and your generosity has made the completion of this project possible. I owe more thanks than I can give for my parents who frequently visited from Missouri and gave their time to help me cross the finish line. Like our heavenly Father, they never cease to give of themselves for their children. I am also grateful for my extended family who has continuously prayed for me. There is no replacement for the support they have provided. My gratitude also goes out to Mamaw

and Papaw (Sally and Gene), who, through weekly FaceTime visits, were able to constantly spur me on by asking about “the paper.” Thanks in part to their unwavering support and attention, the paper is completed. My father and mother-in-law, Rick and Sue Parrott, deserve my deep gratitude. I cannot imagine more supportive and encouraging in-laws. They have been willing to do whatever it takes to help see this project through and were present to lend a hand even to the final day of its completion. I will be forever thankful their generosity and love.

Dr. Michael Haykin, who graciously agreed to advise my PhD studies, deserves special thankfulness and praise. I was continually inspired during his classes, not only to consider history, but to consider the God of history, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. His dedication and attention to me personally and my work were a constant source of life and encouragement. Dr. Haykin’s investment in me has made this research possible. I am thankful to have learned church history under such learned historian, godly Christian, and thoughtful friend.

Candace, my beloved wife and best friend, deserves my most heartfelt thanks and praise. Candace has been by my side since I began my theological education journey in 2010. We have grown up together in our knowledge of the Lord and I dedicate this dissertation to her for unwavering commitment to its completion. Being married to a PhD student requires spouses to carry a significant burden. Candace has carried this burden with extraordinary selflessness and sacrifice. Along the way she has seen me through many seasons, the lofty highs and the desperate lows. In all seasons, she has shown herself faithful. Her dedication to our marriage and our family is an immeasurable gift from the Lord that has kept this project moving forward. Without her daily encouragement, constant prayer, and inexhaustible endurance, I could not have written this dissertation. She has walked every step of the way with loving endurance, joy, and hope. Candace, my love, thank you.

Finally, my two boys, Jonny and Winston, are deserving of thanks. They have cheered me up along the way and have brought so much joy to my life.

Editing note: In the citation of Gill and other figures, their grammar punctuation, and spelling, has been kept unmodified. All alternative “s” scripts have been modernized, and italicization has been dropped except where noted in footnotes.

Jonathan Elliot Swan

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The ideas and consequences of the Enlightenment were not confined to the halls of academe and tables of coffee-houses, the latter being a key locale for the germination and propagation of Enlightenment thought. Far from a mere academic debate, the Enlightenment presented grave challenges to Christian orthodoxy. This is no less true for the eighteenth-century English Particular Baptists, who witnessed an onslaught on a foundational doctrine of their faith—the eternal sonship of Jesus Christ. While other dissenting denominations, notably the Presbyterians and General Baptists, crumbled under the assault, the Particular Baptists held their ground. Key to Particular Baptist steadfastness was the pastor-theologian, John Gill (1697–1771). Born in Kettering, John Gill’s fifty-one year ministry in London, providing pastoral oversight to the congregation that C. H. Spurgeon would later pastor, was central to his role as a defender of the Faith. An autodidact with a voluminous output, Gill’s contributions to biblical exegesis and systematic theology are vital for understanding Particular Baptist thought in the long eighteenth century. By the end of his life, Gill had completed an exposition of both the New and Old Testaments, followed by one of the few eighteenth-century systematic theologies, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (1769–70). Although Gill’s career included writings on a variety of theological and practical topics, the doctrine of the Trinity was of special importance to him. Early in his career, Gill dedicated a treatise to explaining and defending the doctrine of the Trinity. He would later compose additions to his congregation’s church confession in the areas of eternal Sonship and Christology in order to protect his flock from anti-Trinitarian errors. Gill not only considered it essential to support these doctrines scripturally, but he gave

emphasis to the teaching of the church throughout the ages as evidenced by his *A Dissertation Concerning The Eternal Sonship of Christ*,¹ an historical account of eternal generation. Gill was thus aware of his surroundings and sought to keep his church (and his readers) on the path of orthodoxy. He was unwavering in his commitment to Christ's eternal sonship—to lose this doctrine was to lose Christianity itself.

Historical Summary of Research

The magnitude of Gill's achievements, both in regard to his actual thought and volume of output, has not been mirrored in the scholarly attention given to Gill. Major books, essays, and doctoral dissertations on Gill are relatively scarce in the twentieth century, and the theses among these relatively few works have continued to shaped the popular perception of Gill—with a few exceptions—into the present era. Much of the scholarship on Gill has been taken up with the issue of Gill's alleged hyper-Calvinism. With some exceptions, this is the issue about which Gill has been studied, and the perspective from which he has been generally viewed. This thesis hopes in part to correct this narrow perspective of Gill by examining his contributions to Trinitarian theology, which necessarily casts him as a theologian in conversation with church tradition more broadly. I will proceed by outlining the general narrative of research on John Gill from the twentieth century onwards and conclude by giving special attention to those works that have bearing on my proposed thesis.²

¹ This work was published posthumously in John Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts*, 2 vols. (London: George Keith, 1773). John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (1838; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2006), 87.

² What follows is not an exhaustive account of works about Gill, or works that reference him in some way; it is rather a representative account of Gill research meant to provide a succinct narrative of Gill studies.

The Received View

The received view of previous historians that has generally held among Gill scholarship pictures Gill as a proponent of what is generally referred to as “high” or “hyper” Calvinism. Joseph Ivimey considered Gill to be among those who accepted the “non-invitation scheme” of preaching to detrimental effect.³ J. M. Cramp assessed Gill’s contribution to Baptist decline similarly.⁴ This perspective was exemplified by Leon McBeth in the twentieth century, who bestowed upon Gill the title of “leading Hyper-Calvinist,” whom McBeth says “perhaps did more than both of them [John Skepp and John Brine] to spread hyper-Calvinism among the Particular Baptists.”⁵

Robert Seymour’s thesis at the University of Edinburgh was the first major work on Gill in the twentieth century. Seymour’s stated purpose of his thesis was “to

³ Admitting that Gill did not write as “strongly” as John Brine on what he calls “false Calvinism,” Ivimey did say that his doctrine of justification “probably” led to the “necessary consequence” of not addressing unbelievers. He wrote that “it is certain he adopted the non-invitation scheme” of preaching. In another important qualification, Ivimey wrote that Gill never “professedly wrote against the affirmative side of the Modern Question,” although in assessing Gill’s manner of preaching, Ivimey went on to argue that he and Brine had influenced the preaching of many pastors, and “gave the tone” to their preaching. He showed this by quoting a sermon of Gill’s in which he outlined comments on repentance and faith in Acts 10:28. After giving approval to Gill’s exposition of the passage, he then pointed out that “there is no application of these sentiments so as to convince guilty sinners that except they repent they must perish ; and that they cannot escape wrath if they continue to neglect so great a salvation.” Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:272–75. Ivimey’s focus on the lack of application in Gill’s sermons is seen elsewhere, where Ivimey once again proffered a quote of Gill, pointing out a lack of application to unbelievers. His assessment is that Gill’s manner of preaching is out of step with Christ and the apostles. He concluded, “The wonder is not that the churches did not increase, but that they continued to exist when the commission of Christ was not observed, when the example of Christ was not imitated.” Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Isaac Taylor Hinton and Holdsworth & Ball, 1830), 4:23–25.

⁴ Cramp saw the theology of Gill and Brine, as influential ministers, as contributing to Baptist decline. This decline is set in contrast to the latter revival of Wesley and Whitefield. Despite this seemingly negative assessment of Gill, Cramp provided a short account of Gill’s life that highlighted some of his important contributions. Thus, his assessment is not entirely negative and focused on his role in Baptist decline. J. M. Cramp, *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (1869; repr., Baptist History Series 15; Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2000), 499–500, 506–12.

⁵ It is noteworthy that McBeth appears reliant on Ivimey in part for his assessment on hyper-Calvinism among the particular Baptists. H. Leon. McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 176–77. Robison provided a short account of Gill and his legacy, voicing a familiar assessment of Gill and his influence in spreading hyper-Calvinism. Olin C. Robison, “Legacy of John Gill,” *Baptist Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (July 1971): 111–25. Reference should also be given to Robison’s larger study of particular Baptists, in which he viewed Gill as a proponent of hyper-Calvinism. To Robison’s credit, he rightly identified Gill as belonging “in the tradition of the seventeenth century Divines,” continuing to describe Gill as a “scholastic, a dialectician, [and] a master systematizer.” Olin C. Robison, “The Particular Baptists in England” (DPhil thesis, Regent’s Park College, 1963), 35.

introduce John Gill's thought to those for whom he has been merely a name or a passing reference," as he recognized that Gill had largely become a forgotten figure in Baptist life. But beyond a mere introduction, Seymour also sought to "evaluate Gill's theology" and to assess the degree to which Gill's "influence was responsible for a decline among Particular Baptists."⁶ Seymour's perspective of Gill is less than sympathetic, however, as he stated, "Gill's theology contributed nothing toward overcoming the religious apathy of the age. Gill's theology was cold and abstract. It lacked sufficient warmth to satisfy the hunger of human hearts, and it was remote in its relationship to the everyday affairs of men's lives."⁷ With regard to hyper-Calvinism, Seymour argued that Gill adopted the hyper-Calvinism of Joseph Hussey through the influence of John Skepp.⁸

By the end of the next decade, Peter Toon had written his book on hyper-Calvinism, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689–1765*, which has been viewed as an authoritative work on the historical and theological development of hyper-Calvinism.⁹ In the preface, J. I. Packer noted that it was the first of its kind, and to this day there does not appear to be another work so authoritatively cited on these issues. Toon chose three examples of hyper-Calvinism in his book, among which is John Gill.¹⁰ Over a decade later in 1983 came Curt Daniel's massive thesis,

⁶ Robert E. Seymour, "John Gill, Baptist Theologian" (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1954), iii–iv.

⁷ Seymour, "John Gill," 311.

⁸ Seymour, "John Gill," 51–56.

⁹ Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689–1765* (1967; repr., Weston Rhyn, UK: Quinta Press, 2003). For instance, Toon wrote the entries on Hyper-Calvinism for at least two encyclopedias/dictionaries. See Peter Toon, "Hyper-Calvinism," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 324–25; Toon, "Hyper-Calvinism," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 190.

¹⁰ Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, 7–8, 93–103.

Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill.¹¹ Like Seymour, Daniel's thesis was also written at the University of Edinburgh. Daniel posited Gill as the "foremost" writer of hyper-Calvinism. He regarded Gill as the "leader" of the hyper-Calvinists and the one who brought "cohesion" to the movement.¹²

Revised Views

The consensus view in Gill scholarship began to be challenged by the Baptist historian, Thomas Nettles. In multiple works, Nettles has sought to free Gill from the stigma of hyper-Calvinism.¹³ The spirit of Nettles' work on Gill is exemplified in an essay on John Gill by Timothy George.¹⁴ The most substantial attempt to exonerate Gill from the charge of hyper-Calvinism is found in a dissertation that Nettles supervised, written by Jonathan White at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹⁵

In 1995 George Ella attempted to fill an immense hole in scholarship of Gill when he undertook to write a detailed biography of Gill's life and thought, *John Gill and*

¹¹ Curt Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1983). I am very grateful to have met Dr. Daniel in 2019, who very generously provided me a printed copy of his thesis.

¹² Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 9.

¹³ Originally published in 1986, Nettles' first article to vindicate Gill sought to show how Gill had been unfairly maligned. Nettles concluded the article by arguing that instead of being blamed for Baptist decline, Gill should rather be credited with gospel preservation. Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 21–54. In a later article, Nettles defended Gill from the charge of hyper-Calvinism, although he modified his previous essay referenced above, noting that "Theoretically Gill held that the non-elect were not obligated to obedience." Thomas J. Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 153. On the same page he wrote, "Although I think the judgment should still be surrounded with cautions and caveats, there may be compelling evidence that Gill held to the distinctive Hyper-Calvinist tenet" (153n60). See also, Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 1, *Beginnings in Britain* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 195–242.

¹⁴ Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 11–33.

¹⁵ Jonathan Anthony White, "A Theological and Historical Examination of John Gill's Soteriology in Relation to Eighteenth-Century Hyper-Calvinism" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

The Cause of God and Truth.¹⁶ Ella's biography is also openly "first and foremost, a vindication of a very maligned man of God."¹⁷ Ella's work goes into greater detail of Gill's life than any work in the twentieth century, and thus his biography is the most substantial since the memoir written by John Rippon, which had been published in 1809–1810.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Ella, in his attempts to defend Gill, spent a great deal of time harshly critiquing Andrew Fuller (and contemporary scholars with whom he disagrees) to an extent that one wonders whether or not his case would be stronger by including more positive assessment of Gill, and less negative assessment of Fuller. Regardless of these issues, his biography is a good source of historical data alongside Rippon.

Richard Muller's scholarship has also contributed to a reassessment of the consensus view. Although his earlier essay on Gill's doctrine of the *pactum salutis* has been used as a support for the consensus view, Muller has explicitly eschewed scholarship that conceives of Gill's identity in terms of his Calvinism. Crucial to my approach towards Gill is Richard Muller's comments in his essay in Haykin's edited *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771)*. Muller hinted at the need for further examination of Gill's theology in his essay, "John Gill and the Reformed Tradition," when he wrote concerning Gill's label as a hyper-Calvinist, "the problem inherent in these identifications and assessments is that they presuppose, as a primary point of reference, the fundamentally flawed explanation of later Reformed theology as a deviation from Calvin's thought brought about, in large part, by [the] approach of

¹⁶ B. R. White mentioned this lacuna in the first sentence of his biographical article. White's article outlines Gill's early life in ministry, highlighting the difficult circumstances surrounding his early ministry, relationship with the Baptist historian Thomas Crosby, and Gill's church covenant that replaced the former drawn up by Benjamin Keach. B. R. White, "John Gill in London (1719–1729): A Biographical Fragment," *Baptist Quarterly* 22 (1967): 72–91.

¹⁷ George M. Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Durham, NC: Go, 1995), 25.

¹⁸ Haykin notes that Rippon's memoir was first included as a preface to Gill's 1809–1810 edition of his *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Michael A. G. Haykin, "Introduction," in Haykin, *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 4n14. A later edition is available by Sprinkle Publications, which is a reprint of a standalone edition from 1838; see Rippon, *Memoir*.

Theodore Beza (1519–1605) to the doctrine of predestination.” In this context, Muller referenced both Peter Toon and Curt Daniel—whose works have been extremely influential in identifying Gill as a hyper-Calvinist—as examples of this thesis. My perspective has, admittedly, been shaped by Muller’s assessment of Gill.¹⁹ I agree with Muller, who assesses Gill’s sources of thought and concludes that “after the Bible, the main positive points of reference for Gill’s theology were the great Reformed and Puritan writers of the seventeenth century.”²⁰ From this observation, Muller further argued that “it locates Gill in relation to the Reformed dogmatic tradition, specifically, the tradition of Puritanism and its continental analogue, post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy.”²¹ Muller demonstrated Gill’s likeness to this tradition by including him in his magisterial four-volume work, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. This dissertation takes Muller’s assessment as a point of departure in its own assessment of Gill and seeks to further demonstrate Gill’s “significant awareness and use of the theological works of [the] Reformed” to illuminate Gill’s consistency with this tradition.²²

There are two dissertations in the twenty-first century that are worthy of note in contributing to this reassessment of Gill. One is that of Jonathan White, mentioned above, and the other from Hong-Gyu Park. Park’s dissertation, submitted in June 2001, drew upon Muller’s perspective and sought to identify Gill as a Reformed orthodox theologian, rather than a hyper-Calvinist. Park sought to address the question of Gill’s

¹⁹ Richard A. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century,” in Haykin, *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 52.

²⁰ Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition,” 55.

²¹ Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition,” 55.

²² Muller describes some of Gill’s method in terms of his “traditional exegetical-topical exposition.” Drawing on Muller’s use of the term “traditional,” this dissertation will further detail where Gill follows familiar, or traditional patterns of exegesis or theological argumentation. I will also employ the phrase “pattern of exegesis” and the like, phrases which are also drawn from Muller. For instance, Muller spoke about “patterns and models of exegesis.” Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 4:140, 120.

hyper or high Calvinism and the relation of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility by examining "Gill's theological development and tradition, and the understanding of theology, Scripture, God, creation and providence that shaped his ideas of salvation and evangelism." In doing so, Park argued "that Gill maintained the typical Reformed balance between the sovereign grace of God and human responsibility, or between grace and nature, throughout his whole theological system."²³

Vindicating the Received View

Despite efforts to exonerate Gill of the charge of hyper-Calvinism, David Rathel has recently attempted to vindicate the received view by identifying Gill as a "high" or hyper-Calvinist, explicitly challenging the defenses of Ella and Nettles.²⁴ Rathel's work on Gill fits into his larger project, some of which is incorporated into his recently-submitted dissertation at the University of St. Andrews, in which he seeks to provide a more accurate account of the hyper-Calvinist theology against which Andrew Fuller formulated his theology in order to give new insights into the latter's thought.²⁵

Seeing where the current discussion of Gill has left off, as well as that on the wider issue of hyper-Calvinism, an end to the question of Gill and his relationship to

²³ Hong-Gyu Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)" (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2001), vi.

²⁴ David Mark Rathel, "Was John Gill a Hyper-Calvinist? Determining Gill's Theological Identity," *Baptist Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (January 2017): 56–59. In an essay in which Rathel drew on Muller's essay about Gill's doctrine of the *pactum salutis*, Rathel argued that Gill made a "significant innovation to the doctrine of the covenant of redemption," and that "Current surveys of his theology have unfortunately not adequately explored this innovation. The primary cause of this failure is a lack of attention to Gill's historical context, a context shaped by doctrinal antinomianism and no-offer Calvinism." According to Rathel, Gill's used his covenant theology was the basis for his "no-offer" theology that was in line with that of Joseph Hussey and John Skepp. David Mark Rathel, "John Gill and the History of Redemption as Mere Shadow: Exploring Gill's Doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 4 (2017): 377–99. In another of Rathel's articles, he offered Gill as an "imperfect representative of a Baptist catholicity." Rathel did so by examining Gill's understanding of the rule of faith/analogy of Scripture, and by overviewing Gill's use of patristic terminology in formulating his doctrine of the Trinity. David Mark Rathel, "A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity: The Scriptures and the Tradition in the Theology of John Gill," *Baptist Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 108–16.

²⁵ I want to thank David for allowing me access to his dissertation, which he plans to revise in some areas for publication. This summary is taken from David's thesis abstract. David Rathel, "A Pastor-Theologian in Search of a Faith Worthy of All Acceptation: The Theological Genealogy of Andrew Fuller and His Critique of It" (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2018).

hyper-Calvinism is unlikely until a thorough account of the “hyper-Calvinist” sources is given, accompanied by a consistent definition of this point of view and a theological-practical matrix by which theologians may be judged.

Beyond the Hyper-Calvinism Narrative

Although the hyper-Calvinist question has dominated Gill scholarship, other questions have been explored. Tom Ascol’s 1989 dissertation comparing the federal theologies of Gill and Fuller is one such example.²⁶ Earlier, in 1981, Richard Muller published an article titled, “The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill’s Critique of the Pactum Salutis,” which brought another advance to the study of Gill’s covenantal theology.²⁷ J. V. Fesko has also included Gill in his recent works on the covenant of redemption.²⁸ Additionally, in 2010 Jared File completed his master’s thesis that examined Gill’s ecclesiology with reference to his exposition on the Song of Solomon.²⁹

²⁶ Thomas K. Ascol, “The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

²⁷ Muller found Gill’s significance as a thinker in his “reformulation of the federal system around the principles of the eternal decree, the absolutely free and unmerited gift of grace in salvation, and justification of the elect from eternity.” This reformulation, which was a “critique and development of the Reformed doctrine of the *pactum salutis*,” sought to include the Holy Spirit in the eternal covenant of salvation. According to Muller, it was this particular doctrine that “crystallized” Gill’s “soteriological deterministic” system. Richard A. Muller, “The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill’s Critique of the Pactum Salutis,” *Foundations* 24, no. 1 (March 1981): 4–5, 12.

²⁸ Fesko used Gill as an example of those who held to the covenant of redemption and eternal justification. He contrasted Gill’s view with Edwards, whom he believes held that final justification cannot be known until final judgment. In this way, he viewed them as examples of “polar extremes,” stating that most Reformed theologians “were somewhere in between.” Thus, they were both “exceptions to the general pattern” when accounting for justification with relation to the covenant of redemption. J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2016), 30–31, 44. See also Fesko’s treatment of Gill’s doctrine of the covenant of redemption in his related work, focused more on the historical development of the doctrine. J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 110–121.

²⁹ File concluded from his study that Gill’s interpretation of Song of Solomon used the “analogy of faith” to counter claims of enlightenment rationalism by preaching “the only proper Christian interpretation.” According to File, “Gill’s ecclesiological claims within the commentary do not flow directly from the Song of Solomon; rather in references to ecclesiological images or terminology within the Son, Gill draws support from similar images or terminology elsewhere in Scripture from which these claims are actually derived.” Jared Adam File, “John Gill’s Ecclesiology with Reference to His Work: An Exposition of the Book of Solomon’s Song Commonly Called Canticles” (ThM thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 1.

In 2014, Robert Lucas Stamps submitted his dissertation defending dyothelite Christology, devoting a section of his work to Gill.³⁰ The next year, Matthew Haste completed his dissertation on marriage, focusing on this theme in the life and theology of John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller. After a brief introduction to Gill, Haste composed an exposition of Gill's theology of marriage.³¹

The most significant work to go beyond issues of hyper-Calvinism, though without ignoring the issue, is Michael Haykin's edited volume *The Life and Thought of John Gill*.³² Haykin's book is easily the best overview and reference work on John Gill published to date. This edited volume includes a range of topics, written by multiple authors, that strategically treats important aspects of Gill's life and thought. Additionally, the authors approach Gill from various perspectives, presenting differing interpretations of Gill. It remains a helpful introduction, and demonstrates that there are many more avenues of Gill research that demand deeper reflection and study.

Trinitarianism

Steven Godet's dissertation is the only study fully dedicated to Gill's Trinitarianism, while other Gill studies treat his doctrine of the Trinity to a much lesser extent.³³ A generally negative view can be evinced in Seymour's analysis of Gill's Trinitarianism, to which he gives but brief attention. He quickly introduced the controversy of Gill's time, outlines some general arguments for the doctrine of the

³⁰ Robert Lucas Stamps, "'Thy Will Be Done': A Dogmatic Defense of Dyothelitism in Light of Recent Monothelite Proposals" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 135–48.

³¹ Matthew David Haste, "Marriage in the Life and Theology of John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 90–122.

³² Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

³³ Steven Tshombe Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

Trinity, providing assessment along the way.³⁴ In the course of his brief introduction to Gill's Trinitarianism, Seymour highlighted Gill's use of what he called the "well worn analogy" to explain why the Son is called the Word. The introductory nature of Seymour's thesis prevented him from providing a thorough analysis of Gill's use of the mind analogy and its relation to Gill's doctrine of eternal generation. This dissertation will explicate Gill's understanding of the Son as the Word, its exegetical basis, theological formulation, his use of the mind analogy to explain it, Gill's location in the history of its use, and its function in Gill's theology more broadly. Seymour was entirely unconvinced by Gill's attempts to explain the doctrine of Christ's eternal sonship: "[Gill] was unable to reconcile his belief in the filiation of Christ with the paradoxical corollary conviction of Christ's eternal, equal, and co-existent reign with the Father."³⁵

Fisk's nineteenth-century treatment of Gill included a brief (less than five page) overview of his Trinitarian doctrine.³⁶ Fisk rightly, however, recognizes a similarity between Calvin and Gill in their "use of the term *person*, to designate the distinctions in the Godhead." Fisk also recognized that Gill believed generation was the begetting of the Son's person, not essence. By asserting this distinction, Fisk believed Gill had "manifestly departed from the Nicene doctrine." Fisk contrasted Gill's view with Nicene orthodoxy, writing that "[w]ith some few exceptions, the Fathers, during that period in which the Nicene creed was the recognized symbol of the faith of the church, hold that generation related, not to the *personality* of the Son, merely, but to the divine *substance*, or *essence*. According to Dr. Gill and many modern divines, not the essence (*οὐσία*) of the Son is generated by the Father, but personality (*ὑπόστασις*)." Thus, Fisk stated his

³⁴ Seymour, "John Gill," 82–90.

³⁵ Seymour, "John Gill," 86–88.

³⁶ Daniel T. Fisk, "The Theology of Dr. Gill," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 14, no. 54 (1857): 352–56. Fisk, like others mentioned previously, negatively assessed Gill: "And on the whole subject of the interior economy of the Godhead, he speaks, not irreverently, but with something of the confident and dogmatic tone of one who felt that by searching he had found out God to perfection" (353).

conclusion: “Here is an important departure from the ancient doctrine.”³⁷ Fisk was correct to point out that Gill, on the issue of a communication of the essence, departed from early church tradition. This dissertation takes up this exact issue in chapter 4. Fisk implied a connection between Gill’s doctrine to Calvin on this point when he highlighted their similarity of use of the term “person.” Building on Fisk’s observation, this dissertation will explore Gill’s departure from the early church view of eternal generation and locate Gill in the trajectory of Calvin’s doctrine of the Son as *autotheos* by adopting a minority view among the Reformed. This dissertation will also explain Gill’s doctrine in light of eighteenth-century anti-Trinitarianism and demonstrate how his doctrine of divine aseity functioned in his understanding of the Son’s eternal generation.

Curt Daniel considered Gill’s doctrine of eternal Sonship as it pertained to his hyper-Calvinism, noting that Gill defended the doctrine, not only because it had ramifications for the doctrine of God, but also for the Covenant of Grace. Thus, Daniel connected Gill’s Trinitarianism and federalism, stating that they were each necessary “for the establishment of the other.” Both of these doctrines “necessitated the doctrine of eternal sonship.”³⁸ Daniel also treated Gill’s doctrine of the incarnation as it pertained to Pre-Existerianism, a minority view even among hyper-Calvinists, which argued “that the doctrine of eternal sonship just does not make logical sense.” Identifying Sonship language with Christ’s human nature, they regarded Christ’s human soul as eternal by virtue of the divine decree, thus stressing God’s immanent acts. Daniel connected this doctrine with the “Hyperist tendency to push back into eternity as much from time as possible,” using eternal justification as an example. Daniel showed that Gill rejected Pre-Existerianism, holding that Christ would eventually take on a human nature in time,

³⁷ Fisk, “The Theology of Dr. Gill,” 356–57n5.

³⁸ Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill,” 247.

rather than eternity.³⁹ Beyond the theses of Seymour and Daniel, Timothy George has written a short survey of Gill's doctrine of the Trinity,⁴⁰ as have Nettles⁴¹ and Haykin.⁴² Also Ella's biography has a brief treatment of the Trinitarian controversy in Gill's day, along with a discussion of his involvement in it.⁴³

Park's dissertation includes a chapter outlining Gill's doctrine of the Trinity, moving, as Gill does in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, from unity to plurality in God, outlining the distinctions, relation and order of the three persons, and concluding with the distinct personality and deity of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Park related Gill's Trinitarian theology to his wider argument, concluding that Gill's "trinitarian understanding of the works of God clearly show that Gill maintains a Reformed tension between grace and nature, revelation and reason even in his arguments of the Trinity."⁴⁴ This dissertation will build upon Park, especially in demonstrating the influence of the Reformed scholastics on his thinking. This dissertation will also affirm Park's analysis "that Gill firmly and without compromise, stood by the traditional understanding of the Trinity." While Park also stated that "Gill does not show originality," this dissertation will demonstrate that Gill demonstrated a level of independence from the tradition in following Calvin's doctrine of aseity.⁴⁵ In doing so, this dissertation will focus more specifically on Gill's exegesis and theological formulation in conversation with the

³⁹ Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 250–57.

⁴⁰ George, "John Gill," 22–24.

⁴¹ Nettles briefly presents Gill's doctrine of the Trinity in the context of explaining the important roles of Gill's study and preaching. Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:214, 215–19.

⁴² Haykin brings out the importance of Gill's Trinitarianism in the eighteenth century, focusing mainly on aspects of Gill's doctrine of the Holy Spirit to illustrate his Trinitarian theology. Michael A. G. Haykin, "Remembering Baptist Heroes: The Example of John Gill," in *Ministry by His Grace and for His Glory: Essays in Honor of Thomas J. Nettles*, ed. Thomas K. Ascol and Nathan A. Finn (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2011), 32–37.

⁴³ Ella, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 107–10.

⁴⁴ Park, "Grace and Nature," 256.

⁴⁵ Park, "Grace and Nature," 233.

Reformed orthodox and provide detailed analysis of two key areas of thought related to eternal generation: the Son's aseity and the meaning of his name—the Word.

There has been a recent surge of theses from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary that include reference to Gill with respect to Trinitarianism. In 2008, Aaron Timmons wrote a ThM thesis outlining arguments for the deity of Christ in the writings of John Gill, Dan Taylor, and Andrew Fuller. In the course of about twenty pages, he set Gill in the context of eighteenth-century Trinitarian controversy and outlined his sources and argumentation used for defending the deity of Christ.⁴⁶ Samuel Newton's 2017 PhD thesis, focusing on the Spirit's work of adoption in the Johannine Corpus, also used Gill as an example of Puritan exegesis. In doing so he highlighted Gill's doctrine of the *pactum salutis* and its impact on the Spirit and adoption.⁴⁷ Most recently, Huafang Xu's dissertation on Anne Dutton's Trinitarian spirituality referenced Gill in various places, especially in her section dealing with Particular Baptist defenses of the Trinity.⁴⁸

The most significant PhD thesis pertaining to aspects of Gill's doctrine of the second person is that of Steven Godet.⁴⁹ His thesis, submitted in 2015, provides an overview of Gill's Trinitarian theology, with special attention to his use of patristic sources. Godet was also able to provide an extensive historical analysis of Gill's context, political, cultural, and religious, prior to documenting the Trinitarian controversy from 1688 to 1729. Godet's main treatment of the deity of Christ in Gill's theology is found in two chapters, one dealing with distinctions among the persons in the Trinity, and the other dealing with their distinct deity and personality. In both chapters, Godet's overall

⁴⁶ Aaron Jason Timmons, "The Cause of Christ and Truth: Arguments for the Deity of Christ in the Anti-Socinian Writings of John Gill, Dan Taylor, and Andrew Fuller" (ThM thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 21–41.

⁴⁷ Samuel Joseph Roy Newton, "The Spirit of Sonship in the Johannine Corpus" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 60–100.

⁴⁸ Huafang Xu, "Communion with God and Comfortable Dependence on Him: Anne Dutton's Trinitarian Spirituality" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 56–66.

⁴⁹ Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill."

structure follows Gill's organization as presented in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. Godet supplemented Gill's material in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* by drawing from other sources in Gill, while at the same time giving commentary to pertinent contemporary debates. This dissertation will affirm Godet's thesis that "Gill's formulation and defense of the doctrine of the Trinity was faithful to the Scriptures and was vital to the preservation of orthodox trinitarianism among Particular Baptists in the long eighteenth century."⁵⁰

What Godet does not do, which this thesis intends to do, is to further explore aspects of Gill's doctrine of Christ's eternal sonship, namely the relation between eternal generation and aseity, and what it means for the Son to be the Word of God. This thesis will do so while also giving more attention to Gill's Reformed sources and his continuity and discontinuity to previous thought.

Significance

With regard to scholarship on Gill, this project is significant for the simple fact that there has yet to be a sustained treatment of Gill's doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship. While there have been studies, such as those of Godet, Park, and others, which provide helpful overviews of Gill's Trinitarianism, and reference to Gill's Trinitarianism in other works, specific attention in the degree of this project has yet to appear. The importance of Gill's Trinitarianism is highlighted by the inclusion of Gill in the works outlined above, and the importance of this project will be in building on the foundations laid by others as this dissertation explores significant aspects of Gill's doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship, both in its eighteenth-century context and in the larger history and development of doctrine. Since the doctrine of eternal generation was a major pressure

⁵⁰ Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 9.

point in Christian orthodoxy, as Gill himself realized, his argumentation and articulation is worthy of a more in-depth examination than what has yet to appear.

There has also been a recent spike in interest of Gill among Southern Baptist theologians. This is a welcome change, since Gill's reputation has been far too long marred by a hyper-focus on hyper-Calvinism. The recent interest in Gill should be met with scholarly treatments of those theological points at which he is most valuable for theological retrieval, as well as most valuable in his own time. The doctrine of the eternal Son of God is indeed one such area of study.

This project is also significant on an historical level since the theological and intellectual issues that this dissertation will explore were of great importance during Gill's lifetime. The churches in eighteenth-century England faced grave challenges, which proved lethal to both the Presbyterians and General Baptists. As suggested by Nettles and Haykin, Gill played an important role in keeping Particular Baptists from similar destruction.⁵¹

This project is also important due to contemporary debates revolving around the Trinity. In light of recent discussion among Baptists and Evangelicals regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, it is imperative that those bearing the name approach this doctrine with historical sensitivity.⁵² This historical sensitivity requires not only that we pay ministerial deference to the grammar developed throughout the history of the church, but that we also look back to those individuals within our own traditions who have done so.

⁵¹ Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 21. Haykin, "Remembering Baptist Heroes," 32–33.

⁵² For an outline of the recent debate over the Trinity, which piqued my interest in the doctrine, see the following bibliography. It is by no means exhaustive, as articles and books continue to be written in response to this debate sparked in these 2016 articles. Books at a Glance, "The 2016 Trinity Debate: A Bibliography," July 12, 2016, <https://www.booksataglance.com/blog/2016-trinity-debate-bibliography-okay-teach-complementarianism-based-eternal-subordination/>. Cleveland's short article explained how the avoidance of the classical dogmatic categories among Evangelicals, alongside a resurgence of such categories by recent thinkers, made the 2016 "Trinity Controversy" inevitable. Christopher Cleveland, "Why the Trinitarian Controversy Was Inevitable," *Mere Orthodoxy*, June 23, 2016, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/trinitarian-controversy-inevitable/>.

If Baptists want a good example of Trinitarian theology, they need look no further than John Gill.

Thesis

Considering the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in the long eighteenth century, how does the doctrine of eternal generation function in Gill's defense of the Trinity? In what ways did Gill receive or revise the doctrine of eternal generation in defending the eternal Sonship of Christ? What eighteenth century factors led to his specific doctrinal positions regarding Christ's Sonship? To answer these questions this thesis will argue that if the Trinity is the foundational and distinct doctrine of the Christian religion, as Gill believed, its central feature is the doctrine of eternal generation. For Gill, the doctrine of eternal generation provided the foundation for distinctions between the persons within the Godhead and proves the Son's divine nature. Both of these aspects of Gill's doctrine of eternal generation were crucial to defending the doctrine of the Trinity in opposition to Socinianism and a resurgent Sabellianism. This dissertation will decisively show that Gill formulated his doctrine of eternal generation in a manner different than the broader church tradition, taking his doctrine of eternal generation in a Calvinistic direction by denying that the Son received his divine essence from the Father in eternal generation. He argued instead that the Son, like the Father, is the *fons deitatis*, doing so in reaction to the anti-Trinitarianism of his day and age. Gill's doctrine of eternal generation was further bolstered by his understanding of the divine Son as the divine Word, a designation which, according to Gill, spoke to his deity, eternality, and distinct personality. Whereas Gill took Calvin's development of the Son as *autotheos* as a point of departure with respect to generation and aseity, he held to the conventional understanding of the Son as the Word, employing the analogy of the mind to explain the nature of the Son's eternal generation by pointing to the Son's divinity, eternality, and distinct personality. Gill moved his theology of the Word in a Reformed

direction by applying it to his soteriology. By staking a Calvinist view of the Son's generation and by understanding the Son as the Word through the analogy of the mind, Gill demonstrated himself as both a conservative and independent Trinitarian theologian. As Gill confronted eighteenth-century anti-Trinitarianism, he appropriated the traditional Trinitarian grammar in new ways in an attempt to preserve Trinitarian orthodoxy.

As Gill defined his doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ in these ways, he confronted his intellectual context by employing traditional methods of interpretation and theologizing, drawing from a wide range of sources. While Gill eclectically sourced Jewish literature, classical philosophy, and the theological writings from the early church through the post-Reformation period in which he lived, he formulated his doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship by drawing from the theology of the Reformed scholastics.

Methodology

I will support this thesis through an examination of historical sources, both primary and secondary, that will aid in laying out the intellectual and theological landscape immediately prior to and during Gill's life and ministry. Gill's theology will be explicated in light of his historical context, by an examination of his own sources with special attention given to his *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, which provides the most complete and mature look into his thought, his *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, upon which his *Body of Divinity* is supported, as well as *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated* (1731/52), an occasional work that was released in 1731, penned in response to a Sabellian author, William Davis (1643–1751). While special attention will be given to these works, a proper examination of Gill's thought cannot be done without reference to other primary source material. In an attempt to provide such an examination, some attention will also be given to Gill's sermons since Gill was vocationally first a pastor and preacher. I will resource whatever letters and other writings that are extant from Gill when possible and make use of the Horsley-

Down/Carter Lane Church Book, which will provide crucial insights into Gill's ecclesial context. In light of these sources and the context in which Gill thought, I will provide an outline of his doctrine of the eternal Son of God. Along the way, I will give attention to any changes, alterations, or emphases in Gill's thought, pointing out historical details that may provide a rationale for Gill's exegetical, theological, and philosophical decisions.

Argument

Chapter two of this dissertation will argue that the context in which Gill ministered created an atmosphere that was, in some respects, hostile to the doctrine of the Trinity. It will demonstrate that the rationalistic biblicism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century anti-Trinitarianism increasingly proposed challenges to the orthodox doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship. I will then proceed in chapter three to develop Gill's doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship, focusing on his doctrine of eternal generation. This chapter will argue that eternal generation was foundational and a central tenet of his doctrine of the Trinity as it grounded the eternal distinctions within the Godhead without compromising the Son's eternal and divine nature. More than that, it will demonstrate that Gill's doctrine of eternal generation was formulated in a manner consistent with Reformed orthodoxy.

Chapter four of this dissertation argues that while Gill's doctrine of the Trinity and eternal generation fit kindly within the Nicene Definition, he departed from the broader catholic tradition that developed afterward by taking a minority Reformed view in his particular understanding of the aseity of the Son, leading him to deny a communication of essence in eternal generation. This chapter will thus show how Gill affirmed eternal generation as the Son's distinct mode of subsistence by which he is distinguished from the other persons, but that this mode of subsistence does not require the Father to communicate the essence to him. This dissertation will argue that Gill's denial of a communication of essence was influenced by eighteenth-century

subordinationist Christology and reveals Gill's traditional, but independent mindedness as a theologian.

Chapter five will explore how Gill's held to the traditional understanding of the Son as the Word, which informed his thinking on the Son both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. This chapter will argue that Gill believed the apostle John was influenced by the Old Testament to apply the name Logos to the Son. It will further demonstrate that Gill's understanding of this name descended from the early church's Apostolic Fathers and Apologists' understanding of the Son as the internal (Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and spoken word (Λόγος προφορικός), showing that he appropriated the doctrine as it had been developed through figures such as Augustine and Aquinas in a manner consistent with other Reformed scholastics. This chapter will then demonstrate how Gill connected the analogy of the mind to the Son's designation as Image and Wisdom in Scripture to further support the distinction and consubstantiality of the Son. It will, finally, argue that understanding the Son as the Logos provided further means for Gill to apprehend the work of the Son in the economy of salvation.

In summary, John Gill contended against threats to the eternal Sonship of Christ by predominately adopting catholic thought. He relied on previous theologians and patterns of exegesis to support his conclusions, particularly those in the Reformed scholastic tradition. In conversation with a variety of sources, Gill strove for a thoroughly biblical and theological understanding of the eternal Son of God that took seriously the importance of the Son's eternal generation, staking a Calvinistic position with regard to the Son's aseity in order to safeguard his deity and equality with the Father, understanding that the Son as the divine Word gives further evidence to his divine nature and distinct personality. In Gill's efforts to conserve the biblical and orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, Gill demonstrated himself as a highly independent thinker.

CHAPTER 2

THE ETERNAL SON OF GOD IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

In order to understand John Gill's theological contributions to Trinitarian theology as they relate to his doctrine of Christ's eternal sonship, it will be necessary to briefly outline the development of Trinitarian theology in England from the seventeenth into the eighteenth centuries, especially as it pertained to the doctrine of Christ's eternal sonship. This chapter will provide a short narrative for the rise of anti-Trinitarian theology in seventeenth-century England before outlining its development into the long eighteenth century by highlighting some of the ideas that would provide the immediate backdrop to John Gill's thought.

The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianism¹

The anti-Trinitarianism that concerned John Gill had a prior history in England during the seventeenth century and consisted in primarily two forms: Socinianism and Sabellianism. The former predominated, although the latter was still a concern of Gill's.

Socinianism took its name from the teachings of Faustus Socinus (1539–1604). While the roots of the Socinian movement may go back to Michael Servetus (1511–1553), it was Socinus who promulgated the teachings that eventually spread and became

¹ I have adapted this heading from Cheynell's work; see Francis Cheynell, *The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianisme Together with a Plaine Discovery of a Desperate Designe of Corrupting the Protestant Religion, Whereby It Appears That the Religion Which Hath Been so Violently Contended for (by the Archbishop of Canterbury and His Adherents) Is Not the True Pure Protestant Religion, but an Hotchpotch of Arminianisme, Socinianisme and Popery: It Is Likewise Made Evident, That the Atheists, Anabaptists, and Sectaries so Much Complained of, Have Been Raised or Encouraged by the Doctrines and Practises of the Arminian, Socinian and Popish Party* (London, 1643).

known as Socinianism.² Socinianism was a movement that considered its project as the next step in the Reformation, finishing that which Calvin and Luther had begun in their break from Rome.³ In their advancement of the Reformation project, Socinians became known for their distinctive doctrines and methodology. Gerard Reedy has distinguished between these two senses of the term “Socinian.”⁴ He wrote that in one sense, it refers to those who hold to the teachings of Faustus Socinus. This entailed “a rationalist scriptural interpretation; the accordance to Jesus of a high place in the divine order but not divinity; the limiting of Jesus’ role in the drama of redemption principally to one of moral exemplarity; the maintenance of minor heterodox doctrines such as mortalism; and the advocacy of a wide tolerance for believers of all creeds.” In another way, “Socinian” may refer to “a methodology that, for those who used it, places a greater accent on human reason of the interpreter and the fullness of scriptural revelation.” However, not everyone neatly fit into these categories.⁵

² Lee Gatiss, “Socinianism and John Owen,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 4 (2016): 43–44.

³ According to H. John McLachlan, “Essentially, Socinianism is a development of humanism and the reformation, a heretical child of both. Socinian writers considered themselves as representing a further stage in the Reformation, completing the work which Luther and Calvin had only begun. The great reformers, by their break with Rome, had prepared the ground; it remained for the more fundamental work of renovation to be carried through. This was, in their view, the logical task of Socinianism, the drawing out of the consequences of the Reformation.” H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 4.

⁴ Gatiss also outlines these in his helpful article: Gatiss, “Socinianism and John Owen,” 44.

⁵ Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 119–20. McLachlan provided the following as “distinguishing features of Socinus’s theological system.” One feature was “its scrupulous and vigorous Biblicism and its acknowledgment of the rights of reason.” He also said that “in Christology Socinus contended against the pre-existence, and denied the divine nature, of Christ.” He also said that Socinus denied the atonement was satisfaction, “can near to Zwingli” in his view of the Lord’s Supper, and believed in “the separation of Church and State.” McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 11–16. Contrary to most definitions of Socinianism, Gomes argues that Socinus should not be seen as a rationalist. He argues this in two, semi-recent publications. “The present article has shown the inadequacy of the oft-repeated claim that the doctrinal system of Faustus Socinus can be attributed to an overweening use of reason in theology. It has established rather that Socinus gives the primacy to Scripture in formulating his doctrinal system.” Alan W Gomes, “Some Observations on the Theological Method of Faustus Socinus (1539–1604),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 69. And in another article he writes thus: “In short, I see little to distinguish the method of FS [Faustus Socinus] as such from that of his PO [Protestant Orthodox] contemporaries. In my view, we must abandon the notion that FS is a rationalist, or a subconscious rationalist, or a forerunner of modern rationalism, or a hybrid of rationalism and supernaturalism—so commonplace in the literature on Socinus—if we are to form a proper estimate of

The Rise of Socinianism

Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) was born in Italy and raised Protestant.⁶ Some of his family experienced Roman Catholic persecution, which he at times avoided, being “outwardly confirmed to the Catholic Church.” Faustus spent time in Switzerland and Transylvania, but eventually landed in Poland.⁷ When Socinus arrived in Poland to flee persecution, he discovered a developing anti-Trinitarianism that was divided and needed “strong and wise leadership,” which he provided. Through his strong efforts, a unified anti-Trinitarian “movement henceforth took his name.”⁸

Despite the experience of persecution near the end of his life, in 1602, just two years before Socinus’ death, a school was founded in Rakow, which became “a Mecca for Socinians.”⁹ In this Socinian Mecca, a printing press was established, through which Socinian writings were published and taken throughout Europe. It was from this press, based on earlier catechisms written by Socinus, that the influential *Racovian Catechism* was published in 1605.¹⁰ After Rakow was overtaken by Jesuits, the Socinian publications were printed from Holland and Amsterdam.¹¹ But the damage had been done. The doctrines of Socinus were already spreading in various parts of Europe. It was only a matter of time before they would take root on English soil.

the great heresiarch and his work.” Alan W Gomes, “Reason Run Amok? The Protestant Orthodox Charge of Rationalism against Faustus Socinus (with Special Consideration of a ‘Smoking Gun’ Passage from *De Jesu Christo Servatore*),” in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard R. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema, *Studies in the History of Christian Tradition* 170 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 565.

⁶ David Munroe Cory, *Faustus Socinus* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1932), 20, 22.

⁷ Cory, *Faustus Socinus*, 23–24, 29–41.

⁸ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 10–11. Cory, *Faustus Socinus*, 64–66.

⁹ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 17–18.

¹⁰ Many attribute the date to 1609, the year it was dedicated to James I. “This was printed in German in 1608, translated into Latin, and dedicated to James I in 1609, and was the means of spreading knowledge of Socinian principles on a wide scale.” McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 18–19. Cory, *Faustus Socinus*, 72.

¹¹ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 19, 23–24.

Socinianism's Growth in England

It was not until after the sixteenth century that Socinian ideas began to be imported to England in any serious measure.¹² After the turn of the sixteenth century, multiple streams merged which brought Socinianism into England. McLachlan posits that Holland functioned as a “gateway” for Socinianism’s spread into England.¹³ Holland functioned as a Socinian gateway in part through various sources of anti-Trinitarian thought, which proved effective and were made possible due to the many trade contacts between England and Holland.¹⁴ McLachlan also argued that an “invasion” of print materials from both Poland and Holland began with the publication of *The Racovian Catechism* in 1609, which was followed by a proliferation of Socinian writings. Of this invasion, McLachlan writes, “Neither threats of punishment, actual processes at law, nor the fulminations and denunciation of learned theologians could stem the quietly inflowing stream of unorthodox doctrine. Never very broad, never very swift, it came into England slowly but surely throughout our period and came to stay.”¹⁵ Strengthening Socinian presence in England came also through local efforts, specifically that of Paul Best (1590–1657) and John Biddle (1615/16–1662). While there were no Socinian books printed in England up until 1646, both Best and Biddle changed that in 1647. Biddle and Best are important figures for consideration, as Paul Lim argued when he wrote that “trinitarian theology in seventeenth century England simply cannot be understood without the foil of Biddle and Best, around and against which numerous trinitarians

¹² McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 26, 35–36.

¹³ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 30–44.

¹⁴ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 30–34.

¹⁵ According to McLachlan, the circulation of Socinian writings was widespread “during the seventeenth century, despite the fact that they were really forbidden reading and that their import from abroad was illegal. Notwithstanding, public and private libraries, especially those of university men, nearly all contained the leading Socinian authorities. Many Anglican and Presbyterians, some few Baptists, and even a Quaker like William Penn, were familiar with the Latin tomes from Poland and Holland in folio, quarto, octavo, and duodecimo.” McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 143–44. See Lim’s account of Best in Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22–38.

defended the sacred mystery and key *fundamentum* of Christianity: the doctrine of the Trinity.”¹⁶

Paul Best (1590–1657): Christ the Vice-Regent of God the Father

Best, who was likely influenced by Socinianism during travel to Germany and Poland, was the first to publish “bearing his own name” to his anti-Trinitarian views.¹⁷ His *Mysteries Discovered* (1647) was a short pamphlet in which he argued that Trinitarianism is pure popery and “was a bombshell thrown into the playground of the trinitarian theologians.”¹⁸ Identifying the Trinity with Rome was one of the ways seventeenth-century anti-Trinitarians, such as Best, established the case that they were true reformers.¹⁹ Best was a two-time graduate (BA, MA) from Cambridge who converted from Trinitarianism sometime after traveling continental Europe. Best was imprisoned in February 1645 after an unpublished manuscript, in which he espoused “Socinian sympathies,” was communicated to Parliament.²⁰ While imprisoned, Best wrote his *Mysteries Discovered* in order to appease his conscience, repair his reputation, and plead for his release. He predicted that in light of his present mistreatment and abuses more broadly, the future state of England would be worse than during the Civil Wars.²¹ Doctrinally, his short piece sought to argue that the traditional doctrine of the Trinity is

¹⁶ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 17. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 149.

¹⁷ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 20. “That he was influenced by Socinian arguments which he there met for the first time seems highly probable . . . , it is not unlikely that he brought back Socinian works from Germany and Poland.” McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 150–51.

¹⁸ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 23.

¹⁹ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 11–13, 28.

²⁰ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 22.

²¹ Paul Best, *Mysteries Discovered: Or A Mercuriall Picture Pointing out the Way from Babylon to the Holy City, for the Good of all Such as During that Night of Generall Errorr an Apostate, 2 Thes. 2.3. Revel. 3.10. Have Been So Long Misled with Romes Hobgoblins* (1647), 1, 2.

scripturally unsound, contradictory, and impeded worship. Historically, he argued that the traditional doctrine of the Trinity was a corruption of the early church.

Comparing Christ as a viceregent to the Father, Best claimed that the Son is not equal to the Father, but is “of like quality” to him.²² In his second chapter, Best responded straightforwardly to the question of the Son’s equality to the Father by arguing that the Son is *not* equal to the Father, but is instead the “tenant *in Capite*, to God the Father . . . both for his words, works, and honours . . . and [is] therefore not coequal.” Instead, “the lesse is dignified by the greater.” Thus, Best denied ontological coessentiality between the Father and the Son, such that when Scripture speaks “absolutely” of God, it is a reference to the Father.²³ Best maintained both a distinction and unity between the Father, Son (and Spirit), but understood their unity not in terms of essence, but economic cooperation in the work of salvation. Contrary to the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, Best did not believe that the Son and Spirit are distinct *and* coequal. The three are not one *ontologically*, but only *functionally* so for salvation.²⁴ As Best understood it, the Son is called “God” only by figures of speech.²⁵ To understand the Trinity as a unity of essence, Best declared, would “confound the Trinity.”²⁶ It would not only confound, but it would create an idol of Christ and take away worship from the Father, thus causing harm to both. In short, it is blasphemy.²⁷ Best thus considered eternal generation—the traditional means of affirming the Son’s distinction and equality with the

²² Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 2.

²³ Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 3–4.

²⁴ Best wrote, “[B]ut for the Son to be coequal to the Father, or the holy Spirit a distinct coequal person I cannot finde; and I beleve that these three are one, or agree and conspire in the substance of the same truth to salvation.” Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 4–5.

²⁵ Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 3, 11.

²⁶ Best explained 1 John 5:7, 8 with reference to Mark 10:8 with regard to marriage when he wrote that the unity is “one by conspiracy, or conjugation, not individuation.” Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 7.

²⁷ Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 9–10.

Father—as “a most grosse contradiction” that does not qualify as a mystery, biblically understood.²⁸

Best also forcefully argued an historical point: that the traditional doctrine of the Trinity was a corruption that had been propped up by the Church of Rome, which he identified as “Babylon.”²⁹ According to Best, opposition to the Roman doctrine of the Trinity marked the end of an age of apostasy, wherein the unity of God is the “mystery discovered.”³⁰

John Biddle (1615/16–1662): Christ the Subordinate Son

While Best was the first to get his work off the press, Biddle quickly followed with a variety of literary efforts for the anti-Trinitarian cause and is often referred to as “the father of English Unitarianism.”³¹ He came to his convictions through “indefatigable search into Scripture,” finding “that the doctrine of the Trinity was clearly illogical and a nonbiblical interpolation.”³² Biddle’s significance is seen in his relentless efforts to write,

²⁸ Paul Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 13. Lim aptly describes Best’s understanding of mystery: “Deconstructing the word *mystery* was another key polemical strategy of Best’s. Acutely aware of the predilection among the trinitarians to rely on ‘mystery’ as a theological category to defend the Trinity, Best reduced the semantic range of the word *mystery* to that of ‘lawless mystery,’ and the mystery of ‘Babylon the great,’ spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 and Revelation 17:5. By glossing together Revelation 10:7 and 14:7, Best arrived at the second use of the concept *mystery* in that the mystery of God centered around the plan of God ‘the Father and Creator.’ Therefore, the ‘invisible and indivisible King’ (1 Timothy 1:17 and 6:15–16; John 1:18; 5:37; 1 John 4:13) was God, the Father, and Best explicitly stated that the ‘inauguration’ of ‘our blessed Saviour’ was his baptism.” Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 25, emphasis original.

²⁹ Best referred to the Trinity “of three coequal persons to be but the Chappel of *Rome*.” Paul Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 5.

³⁰ Best, *Mysteries Discovered*, 11.

³¹ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 163–217. McLachlan uses this title in his chapter heading on Biddle. Stephen D. Snobelen, “John Biddle (1615/16–1662),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 5:673. See Lim’s treatment of Biddle and reaction to him here: Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 16–21, 38–68, 124–71. Peter Toon, *God’s Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen, Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 95.

³² Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 38.

translate, and publish Socinian doctrine.³³ It was likely Biddle who translated *The Racovian Catechism* into English (1652).³⁴ His work, *The Twofold Catechism* (1654), was seen as a significant enough threat for the Council of State to commission an official response.³⁵ John Owen (1616–83) responded to the *Twofold Catechism* with his 600-page refutation, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, in 1655.³⁶

Biddle's *A Confession of Faith* (1648). Having already written against the deity of the Holy Spirit in his *XII. Arguments Drawn out of the Scripture: Wherein The commonly-received Opinion touching the Deity of the Holy Spirit, is clearly and fully refuted* (1647), Biddle aimed his sights at the deity of the Son.³⁷ In the Preface to Biddle's 1648 *A Confession of Faith*, his burden was to clear the church of its idolatrous worship of the Trinity. He compared the worship of the Trinity to ancient Israel's pursuit of idols. Like many anti-Trinitarians, he considered the Reformation only a partial reform. The Reformation did indeed bring true reforms for worship, just not quite enough. Biddle's attack on the Trinity, thus, was part of bringing full reformation to the church:

For though *Luther* and *Calvin* deserve much praise for the pains they took in cleansing our Religion from sundry Idolatrous Pollutions of the Romane Antichrist, yet are the dregs still left behinde, I mean the Gross Opinion touching three Persons

³³ See McLachlan's helpful summary of Biddle's life and thought. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 163–217.

³⁴ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 191–92.

³⁵ McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 205.

³⁶ Ferguson suggests that Owen's work is "probably one of the longest book reviews ever written in the history of the Christian Church!" Sinclair B. Ferguson, "John Owen and the Doctrine of the Person of Christ," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 74.

³⁷ Lim wrote, "Having repudiated the deity of the Holy Spirit in *Twelve Arguments* (1647), it was a matter of time for Biddle to dismantle the other 'Person' of the Trinity." Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 41.

in God. Which error not onely made way for those Pollutions, but lying at the bottome corrupteth almost our whole Religion.³⁸

A common theme of concern for worship and continued reformation are seen in Best and now Biddle also. A purity of worship and renewed reformation meant, for Biddle, advocating a “subordinationist” view of the Son.³⁹ While the content of the name is radically different from traditional Trinitarians, Biddle retained use of the word “Trinity.”⁴⁰ His first article established the superiority of the Father, claiming for him the sole title of God: “I believe, That there is one most high God, Creator of heaven and earth, and first cause of all things pertaining to our salvation, and consequently the ultimate object of our Faith and Worship; and that this God is none but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first Person of the holy TRINITY.”⁴¹

Biddle’s first article, based on John 17:3, distinguished the Father from the Son and Spirit as the “only true God.” He argued from this text that Jesus “so describeth the Father, as that he makes him the onely true God, thereby manifestly excluding any other person whatsoever from being the true God.”⁴² By reasoning through various passages of Scripture, Biddle argued that the Father is God alone. The Son was a created being, who was “made Lord and Christ” after his crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation. The Son and the Spirit alike were excluded from being God when Biddle reasoned, “Wherefore since neither the holy Spirit is an *uncreated* Spirit, nor the Lord Jesus an *unmade* Lord, neither of them, but the Father only is God.”⁴³

³⁸ John Biddle, *A Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity, According to the Scripture* (London, 1648), Preface D4.

³⁹ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 41.

⁴⁰ Lim wrote that “Biddle, perhaps goaded by the draconian trinitarian enforcers, adopted a triadic form to describe the persons of God.” Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 43.

⁴¹ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 1.

⁴² Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 2.

⁴³ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 3–4.

Having established the sole divinity of the Father, Biddle's second article argued that the Son is inferior to the Father:

I believe, That there is one chief Son of the most High God, or spiritual, heavenly, and perpetual Lord and King, set over the Church by God, and second cause of all things pertaining to our salvation, and consequently, the intermediate object of our Father and Worship: and that this Son of the most High God is none but Jesus Christ, the second Person of the HOLY TRINITY.⁴⁴

While Biddle ascribed to the Son high titles, such as “chief Son,” and “Lord and King,” he understood these as titles given to him by the Father, with whom he is *not* equal.⁴⁵ That the Son does not share the same, numerical essence of the Father, Biddle plainly admitted while exegeting Philippians 2. Biddle argued that the Son has an inferior essence, and that “equality” in Philippians 2:6 does not refer to essence and thus coessentiality between the Father and Son.⁴⁶ For Biddle, “Christ Jesus is simply inferior to God, and so not God.”⁴⁷ As he is not God, he is the “the intermediate object of our Faith and Worship,” since the true end of worship is God the Father: “glory & thanks that we give to Christ, and the faith and hope that we place in him, do not rest in him, but through him tend to God the Father, and consequently, that the Son is not equal to the Father, but subordinate to him.”⁴⁸ This is true all the more, as Biddle clarified the nature

⁴⁴ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 9.

⁴⁵ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 9–10.

⁴⁶ Regarding Philippians 2:6, Biddle reasoned in this way on page 12: “Which cannot be in respect of Essence; for he must either have the same Essence in number, or a different one. Not the same Essence in number, for then he will not be equal with God in Essence, but the same: for equality must be in respect of two things different at least in number, otherwise it will not be Equality, but Identity. Thus he that is equal to another in stature, must not have the same stature in number with the other, but different in number, though the same in kinde. But the Adversaries hold that the Father and the Son have the same Essence in number, not in species or kinde. If Christ hath an Essence different in number from that of God, it must needs also be inferior thereunto, there being no Essence equal to his, as everyone will confess. Wherefore the Equality aforesaid cannot be in respect of Essence, but of something else.” Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 10–15. The term “coessentiality” or “coessential” has the same meaning as “homousios” or “consubstantial.” I will continue to use the term with this meaning throughout the dissertation. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 4:175–76.

⁴⁷ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 15.

⁴⁸ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 9,16.

of Christ as “no other then a humane nature” in his third article.⁴⁹ Having rejected Chalcedonian Christology,⁵⁰ Biddle maintained that the Son possesses a singular human nature that is inferior to that of God the Father, nevertheless calling the Son “God” in his human nature.⁵¹ Arguing for a sole human nature, Biddle explicitly disowned the doctrine of eternal generation when he stated that “there is no place in the Scripture that either saith, or intimateth any such thing.”⁵²

In Article IV, Biddle further explained how Christ can be God in his human nature: “Whence, though he [Christ] be our God, by reason of his Divine Sovereignty over us, and Worship due to such Sovereignty, yet is he not the most high God, the same with the Father, but subordinate to him.”⁵³ Biddle summarized Christ’s subordination to the Father while still being a divine entity in the following way:

In all these respects is Christ now rightly stiled a God, having a supernatural, spiritual, and immortal substance; a sublime dominion conferred on him in a supernatural way, even by God raising him up from the dead, and setting him at his owne right hand in the heavenly places; yea a supernatural dominion, even over Angels and the Spirits of men; being also a sovereign benefactor, as bestowing benefits (though in themselves natural, as health, and the like, yet in a supernatural way; yea bestowing supernatural benefits also, as the eternal inheritance, and the pledge thereof, the holy Spirit.⁵⁴

According to Biddle, Christ can be called God, but he is distinct, dependent, and subordinate to God the Father.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 19.

⁵⁰ Biddle rejected the idea that Christ exists in two natures and called it a “common gross opinion.” Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 17.

⁵¹ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 19–29.

⁵² Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 28.

⁵³ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 29.

⁵⁴ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 33.

⁵⁵ Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 35.

Biddle's *Two-Fold Catechism* (1654). The title page of John Biddle's *Twofold Catechism* purported to provide an account of Christianity's "chiefest points" for those who did not claim any specific sect, but who were rather "Meer Christians." Biddle, as insinuated in his extended subtitle, was recovering true Christianity, since other Christians "more or less departed from the simplicity and truth of the Scripture."⁵⁶

Arguing that most catechisms were largely devoid of Scripture reference and true biblical content, coming rather from the ideas of men, Biddle composed his *Catechism* so that the answers to each question were scriptural quotations.⁵⁷ Part of Biddle's recovery project was to deny "mystical" and "figurative" interpretations because they cannot provide a consistent rationale for interpretation, as can literal interpretation. Biddle considered his form of literal interpretation as the most faithful to the Scriptures, the result of which was his view of Christian doctrine.⁵⁸ Taking an anti-Platonist, biblicist stance, Biddle accused his opponents thus: "This is the stone at which the Pride of learned men hath caused them continually to stumble, namely, to think that they can speak more wisely and worthily of God, then he hath spoken of himself in his Word."⁵⁹ Biddle was anxious to do away with the developed grammar of the church as misleading and as part of the smuggling in of "false doctrines." Thus, Biddle concluded that words and phrases such as "subsisting in three persons" and "Eternal Generation"—to name but a few he provided—are neither explicitly named in scripture nor conceptually present.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ John Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism: The One Simply Called A Scripture-Catechism; the Other, A Brief Scripture-Catechism for Children. Wherein the Chiefest Points of the Christian Religion, Being Question-Wise Proposed, Resolve Themselves by Pertinent Answers Taken Word for Word out of the Scripture, without Either Consequences or Comments. Composed for Their Sakes That Would Fain Be Meer Christians, and Not of This or That Sect, Inasmuch as All the Sects of Christians, by What Names Soever Distinguished, Have Either More or Less Departed from the Simplicity and Truth of the Scripture. By John Biddle, Master of Arts of the University of Oxford* (London, 1654), Title Page.

⁵⁷ Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism*, A2–4.

⁵⁸ Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism*, A4–6v.

⁵⁹ Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism*, a1.

⁶⁰ Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism*, a2–4.

Like Best, Biddle saw the development of Trinitarian doctrine throughout history largely as a process of corruption. For Biddle, if one would simply read scripture, “resolving to embrace the doctrine that is there plainly delivered. . .we shall easily discern the Truth, and so be enabled to reduce our Religion to its first principles.” Thus, similar to the Reformers before him, Biddle set out to recover the Scripture’s central and most basic message.⁶¹

Biddle’s understanding of the Father as the true God was continued in his *Twofold Catechism* where he affirmed that there is one God (Eph 4:6), that this God is the Father (1 Cor 8:6) who is Spirit (John 4:24) and the Creator who is to be worshipped “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).⁶² The wording of Biddle’s questions clearly indicated that he was carrying on his subordinationist Christology. For him, Christ’s birth was that of a mere human, and giving Christ the title “Lord” distinguished his subordinate deity from that of God the Father. Biddle further maintained that Jesus Christ was “made Lord” at his resurrection, and he himself has a God to whom he is subject. Biddle’s catechetical questions clearly contradicted the traditional understanding of consubstantiality and the union of natures in Christ. Christ Jesus, the Son of God by human birth, and who was made Lord by God the Father had a beginning, being born from Mary, existing only in a human nature, through which God empowered him to do miracles by the Spirit and not his own divine nature, and who was reliant on God the Father alone.⁶³

Biddle’s biblicist approach to scripture, by which he rejected the established grammar of the church, allowed him to approach his answers through biblical quotation in a manner that eschewed Trinitarian and Christological categories that had been previously utilized to explain the biblical text. His scripture-only approach in response to

⁶¹ Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism*, a6, a2r–v.

⁶² Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism*, 6, 9, 21.

⁶³ Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism*, 26–33.

strategic questions on key points of Trinitarian doctrine negated explicit scriptural interpretation of the texts but clearly pointed to an anti-Trinitarianism that denied the eternity and consubstantiality of Christ.

In highlighting Best and Biddle, it would be wrong to view them as the only two anti-Trinitarians of this era. Neither man was alone. Moreover, there were other Socinian influences as well as other Trinitarian responders.⁶⁴ For instance, Francis Cheynell wrote in *The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianism*, that Socinians “refined and enlarged the ancient heresies.” In other words, Socinianism was dangerous to the core.⁶⁵

Eternal Sonship in the Long Eighteenth Century

The rise of anti-Trinitarianism in the early and mid-seventeenth century led to impassioned disputes in the late seventeenth, early eighteenth centuries. Temporal proximity necessitates an examination of key sources in the Trinitarian debates during this era as they shaped Gill’s intellectual and ministry context. No doubt he was

⁶⁴ McLachlan has three chapters dedicated to other Socinians in England. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 218–316. Lim has a chapter dedicated to the Socinian movement in its broader context, with a corresponding chapter on various responses to Socinianism, specifically John Biddle. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 69–123. England, of course, was not the only place in which Socinian doctrine was opposed. It was opposed and persecuted virtually everywhere it went. McLachlan wrote, “Apart from a comparatively short period at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century and outside the confines of the then tolerant kingdom of Poland, Socinianism found no home or haven.” McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 2. Gatiss also shows the strong response to Socinianism from across the theological spectrum, Catholic and Protestant, that also cut across ethnic and geographical boundaries: “Works dedicated to refuting the Socinian heresy came from French, Transylvania, and especially Dutch Reformed theologians, as well as the English, both conformist and non-conformist.” Everyone had it out for Socinianism, despite their differences, acknowledging it as a serious threat to orthodoxy. Gatiss, “Socinianism and John Owen,” 44–45.

⁶⁵ In Cheynell’s words, “The Socinian error is *Fundamentall*, they deny Christ’s satisfaction, and so overthrow the foundation of our faith, the foundation of our Justification; they deny the Holy Trinity, and so take away the very Object of our Faith; they deny the Resurrection of these Bodies, and so take away the foundation of our hope; they deny original sinne, and so take away the ground of our Humiliation, and indeed the necessity of regeneration; they advance the power of Nature, and destroy the efficacy of Grace.” Cheynell, *The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianisme*, 1, 24, emphasis original. See Lim for an examination of Cheynell’s response to Socinianism. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 172–81.

confronted by these ideas and as a pastor had to deal with their confessional and ecclesial consequences, even within his own church.⁶⁶

Stephen Nye (1648–1719): Reigniting the Fire

The re-publication of Nye’s *A Brief History of the Unitarians* in 1690 has been recognized as igniting a fire of Trinitarian controversy.⁶⁷ This fire would, by pen, enflame religious discussion into the eighteenth century. Nye’s *A Brief History* led to a fiery outbreak on all sides of the issue, creating an enormous amount of controversial literature. This dissertation will overview Nye’s contribution to the Trinitarian conversation, particularly as it relates to the doctrine of Christ’s eternal Sonship, before providing a brief narrative of the following Trinitarian disputes through the 1690s.

According to Philip Dixon, Stephen Nye’s book marked the first in which the term “Unitarian” was used in a title, although it had been used in a 1672 pamphlet by a follower of John Biddle. Dixon has also recognized the curious nature of its title when he wrote, “Despite its claim to be a history this was not a scholarly chronicle but a polemic against the doctrine of the Trinity, and above all an apology for Unitarianism.” Dixon could not be more accurate.⁶⁸ Written in four letters, Nye’s book began by contending for a Socinian doctrine of God prior to composing a brief history of Unitarianism. Nye, from the outset, aligned the history of Unitarianism with Faustus Socinus, from whom comes

⁶⁶ See Godet’s helpful overview of this period of Trinitarian controversy, which, along with the other cited sources, helped orient me to and informed my outline of this complicated period of Christian history. Godet breaks into two “phases.” Steven Tshombe Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 82–121.

⁶⁷ Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 105–7, 109–10. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 82–84. Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), cf. 6.

⁶⁸ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 106.

the name “Socinians.” Nye asserted the central claim of Unitarians, beginning on the very first page of the book:

They affirm, God is only one Person, not three. They make our Lord Christ to be the Messenger, Minister, Servant, and Creature of God; they confess he is also the Son of God, because he was begotten on blessed Mary by the Spirit or Power of God, Luke 1:35. But they deny that he or any other Person but the Father (the God and Father of the said our Lord Christ) is God Almighty and Eternal. The Holy Ghost, or Spirit, according to them, is the Power and Inspiration of God, Luke 1:35.

That the Lord Christ was a Man, the Son, Prophet, Messenger, Minister, Servant, and Creature of God; not himself God, they think is proven by these (as they call them) Arguments.⁶⁹

From here Nye proceeded to outline Unitarian argumentation for their confession of the Father as the only God and Jesus as a created being. It is clear that in defining God as one person and naming this person as God the Father that Nye excluded both the Son and Spirit from absolute deity. The Son is explicitly denied identity as “God Almighty,” thus also explicitly excluding his eternity. According to Nye, Jesus Christ is a man—a creature—“not himself God.”⁷⁰ Nye outlined the Unitarian case against the divinity of Christ in eleven points by arguing that the Father is the head of and is superior to Christ. He argued that Christ is a creature and is subject to God, who mediates for people, not God. God the Father also seeks his own glory and demands he be worshipped, whereas the Son does not. God the Father also has all knowledge, whereas the Son does not have knowledge of all things. Whereas the Father gives to whom he pleases, prays to no one, and has power within himself, the Son gives by the Father’s authority, prays to him, and relies on the Father for his power. The Son is also a “distinct and different Person from God” and the image of God cannot “himself be that one true God.”⁷¹ As will be seen, while John Gill used the identification as the Son as the Image and Word of God

⁶⁹ [Stephen Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians, Called Also Socinians. In Four Letters Written to a Friend* (1687), 3–4.

⁷⁰ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 4.

⁷¹ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 4–12.

as proofs for his coessentiality and eternity, Nye argued that such an identification is contrary to reason:

'Tis (say the Socinians) as impossible that the Son or Image of the one true God should himself be that one true God, as that the Son should be the Father, and the Image that very thing whose Image it is; which they take to be simply impossible, and contradictory to common sense, which Religion came not to destroy, but to improve.⁷²

Anticipating the objection that many of the texts he cited speak to Christ's human nature, when he is also united to the divine nature, Nye responded

that there is in Scripture no real Foundation for such a Conceit; that 'tis inconsistent with almost all the Texts already cited, especially those in which the Lord Christ is spoken of as a distinct and different Person from God; and that there are many other Considerations and Passages of holy Scripture, which no less than demonstrate it to be false.⁷³

Instead, Nye argued that Scripture claims "only the Father is God." He also raised the question as to why Christ needed the Holy Spirit during his earthly ministry if Christ also possessed a divine nature. Nye also questioned why Christ needed to attribute his miracles to the work of the Spirit or the Father if he possessed the power to perform them.⁷⁴ Nye further reasoned that "Had our Lord been more than a Man, the Prophecies of the Old Testament in which he is promised, would not describe him barely as the Seed of the Woman; the Seed of Abraham; a Prophet like unto Moses; the Servant and Missionary of God, on whom God's Spirit should rest."⁷⁵

Returning to his original affirmation, Nye argued that the Trinitarian confession of the Son and Spirit as God is "contrary to the whole Scripture, which speaks

⁷² [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 12, emphasis original.

⁷³ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 12–13.

⁷⁴ Nye seems to give peculiar reference to the union of natures in the person of Christ, as orthodox theologians have understood it. Nye, at times, seems to make the Orthodox sound as if God the Son and Christ are two different persons: "10. Had the Lord Christ been (as *Trinitarians* speak) *God the Son* joyned [sic] to an humane Nature [sic], he could not have ascribed his miraculous Words to the Holy Ghost, or to the Father, dwelling in him; but to the Son dwelling in him and united to him." Stephen Nye, *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 13–15 (quotation from p. 15, cf. 14).

⁷⁵ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 15.

of God as but one Person; and speaks of him and to him by singular Pronouns, such as I, Thou, Me, Him, etc.” He further argued that “No Instance (say the Socinians) can be given in any Language of three Persons, whoever spoke of themselves, or were spoken to, by the singular Pronouns, I, Thou, Me, Him, Thee, &c. Such speaking is contrary to Custom, Grammar, and Sense, which are the Laws of Speech.”⁷⁶ Nye concluded this Unitarian overview by emphatically indicting Trinitarians of irrationality and, implicitly, worship of a false God. He again rehearsed the central claim of Unitarians that there is one person who is God, namely, the Father:

To conclude; Theirs (they say) is an accountable and a reasonable Father; but that of the Trinitarians is absurd, and contrary both to Reason and to itself, and therefore not only false, but impossible. For you (say they) teach, there are three almighty, and most wise Persons, and yet but one God; as if every Almighty and most wise Person were not a God, and consequently three such Persons, three Gods. You add yet more absurdly, that there are three Persons who are severally and each of them true God, and yet there is but one true God; This is an Error in counting or numbering; which when stood in, is of all others the most brutal and inexcusable; and not to discern it, is not to be a Man. But we would not (say they) trouble our selves at the non-sense of this Doctrine, if it did not impose false Gods on us; by advancing two to be Gods, who are not so: and rob also the one true God of the Honour due to him, and of which he is jealous.⁷⁷

The following three letters of Nye’s *Brief History of the Unitarians* answered objections to biblical texts in both the Old and New Testament.⁷⁸ In his examination of the Old Testament, Nye interpreted Psalm 2:7, cross-referencing it with Acts 13:34, to deny that there is a reference to eternal generation; it is rather a prophecy of Christ’s future resurrection.⁷⁹ The Son as eternal Wisdom in Proverbs 8:24 was denied also, and according to Nye was a reference to “the Quality or Faculty of Wisdom, by which God and Men order their Affairs wisely.”⁸⁰ Dealing with a crucial text in the history of

⁷⁶ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 19–20.

⁷⁷ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 24–25.

⁷⁸ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 106–7.

⁷⁹ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 45.

⁸⁰ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 53.

Trinitarian theology, Nye denied that the Prologue of John 1 speaks to Christ's divinity and eternity, contrary to what we will see from John Gill.⁸¹ By relying on Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Nye interpreted the Word in John 1 as a reference to God's attribute of wisdom (as in Proverbs 8:24 above) that is with him in creation and is God (as one of his attributes). Where the Word is spoken of as a person, it is done so as a figure of speech. With reference to John 1:4, Nye believed the "life" that was in Christ was the message of eternal life revealed to the Gentiles (cf. John 12:50) and that the "light" was the doctrine taught by Christ. Thus, Christ Jesus was not the eternal and divine Word; rather, the Word "did abide and inhabit him."⁸² In sum, "The Word (according to Grotius) is not an eternal Son of God, but is here the Power and Wisdom of God; which Word abiding without measure on the Lord Christ; (as it is expressly said, Heb. 1:3. Matt. 28:18. Col. 2:3. See the Notes on these Texts) 'tis therefore spoken of as a Person, and as one Person with Christ and he with that."⁸³ According to Nye, Grotius' interpretation of John 1, in which Christ is indwelt by God's wisdom, helped alleviate the difficulty posed by the text that could lead to Trinitarianism.⁸⁴ Nye continued his Unitarian exegesis by interpreting texts such as John 10:30, 38, that speak of the unity between the Father and Son as a unity of purpose or a unity of affection and love.⁸⁵ For his exegesis of Hebrews 1:2–3, another critical text that is related to John 1, Nye again relied on Grotius. According to Nye, Christ did not make the world, but rather the world was made for him, which

⁸¹ Lim highlighted the importance of John's Gospel in his chapter devoted to its interpretation. He specifically referenced Nye's exegesis in his examination of John's Gospel. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 271–319, 305–8. Emery's treatment of Aquinas' theology of the Son with reference to the Gospel of John also demonstrates its importance to the history of Trinitarian theology. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 183–85.

⁸² [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 80–88.

⁸³ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 88–89.

⁸⁴ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 89.

⁸⁵ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 95–97.

according to Grotius, is consistent with Hebrew literature. Additionally, Christ upholds the universe, not by his own word (and power), but by that power which the Father has given to him:

This [the “Word” in Heb 1:3] is to be understood of God’s Word or Power; not of Christ’s, otherways than it was communicated to him by God, and did abide on him. For the whole Context runs thus, *Who (Christ) being the Brightness of his (God’s) Glory, and the express Image of his (God’s) Person, and upholding (in the Greek, Governing) all things by his (God’s) powerful Word.* So the sense is, Christ upholds the Government and Order of the Church both in Heaven and Earth, he governs the Angels and Spirits of Heaven, and the Church militant on Earth, by *the Word* (i.e. the Power) of God given to him without measure: see also on John 1.1, &c.⁸⁶

According to Nye, therefore, Jesus was not the eternal Word, coequal and coessential with the Father, but a created being whom the Father empowers and enlists to fulfill his God-given governance.

Through the Fire and Flames: Eternal Sonship in the 1690s⁸⁷

Following the publication of Nye’s *A Brief History*, disunity among proponents of the Trinity increased in the 1690s alongside the distribution of anti-Trinitarian writings. These intramural debates among Trinitarians hurt their cause, which was seized upon by the anti-Trinitarians. Thus, through a lack of solidarity, the 1690s became a period of deep Trinitarian instability in England.⁸⁸

In addition to Nye’s *Brief History*, another disruptive work emerged in 1690 called *The Naked Gospel* by Arthur Bury (1623/24–1713), the Rector of Exeter College at Oxford.⁸⁹ Bury claimed that the central message of the Bible was to repent and believe

⁸⁶ [Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians*, 141–42, emphasis original.

⁸⁷ “Through the Fire and Flames” is a song title fittingly from the British metal band DragonForce.

⁸⁸ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 109, 125.

⁸⁹ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 108.

and characterized the doctrine of the Trinity as a “corruption.”⁹⁰ Bury spurned doctrinal speculation that was construed as mystery such as the incarnation and eternal generation. To him, it was an unnecessary danger and distraction. All that was needed was to believe that Jesus was the Christ.⁹¹ Bury’s work, however, met a fiery end, when Oxford University decreed that it be condemned and burned it publicly.⁹²

Although Bury’s work was publicly burned, it was Nye’s work that opened up a discussion that led in part to a dismantling of unity among Trinitarians in the 1690s.⁹³ It was particularly the writings of William Sherlock (1641?–1707), Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, that proved destructive to unity among the Trinitarians.⁹⁴ William Sherlock’s attempt to defend the Trinity by arguing for a specific understanding of divine personhood in terms of consciousness was based upon previous attempts to understand the Trinity in these terms, yet it created instability in the Trinitarian camp through division and confusion. Sherlock believed the unity of persons in the Trinity could be explained in terms of “mutual-consciousness,” and that the distinction of the persons was evidenced in each person’s “self-consciousness.” This recasting of divine unity and distinction in terms of consciousness eschewed the traditional philosophical and metaphysical categories, which Sherlock thought was a benefit since it required “no skill

⁹⁰ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 108. John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England: From the Reformation to the End of the Last Century* (London: Strahan & Co., 1871), 2:195.

⁹¹ Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:197–99. Dixon noted that Bury’s argument against speculation was his primary aim, rather than a rejection of the Trinity: “To be fair, Bury’s polemic is characterized more by a desire to show the superfluousness of theological speculation than a wish to reject the doctrines of the Trinity or Incarnation completely. He was convinced that we do not need to understand how exactly Christ is a person, nor the intricacies of the Incarnation, to be Christians.” Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 108–9.

⁹² Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 109. Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:199–200. [James Harrington], *An Account of the Proceedings of the Right Reverend Father in God, Jonathan Lord Bishop of Exeter in His Late Visitation of Exeter College in Oxford* (Oxford, 1690), 37–38.

⁹³ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 109–10.

⁹⁴ Dixon said of Sherlock, “In the event Sherlock was to prove an example of that strange yet persistent phenomenon, the champion whose very defense wreaks more destruction and havoc than any opponent could ever hope to achieve.” Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 109.

in logic or metaphysics to understand it.” At least one implication of Sherlock’s understanding of personhood as consciousness was his mis-appropriation of Augustine’s analogy of the mind, which implied that there was one mind, not three.⁹⁵ Sherlock’s work was opposed on all sides. As Hunt noted, “The whole world was against Sherlock, from the Catholic Church to the Oxford doctors, from the schoolmen to Dr. South. He was universally condemned as a setter-forth of three gods.”⁹⁶

Another Trinitarian proponent was John Wallis (1616–1703), who provided a defense of the Trinity by upholding the standard Trinitarian grammar. Wallis’ defense took the form of individual letters, eight in all, in which he went back and forth with numerous respondents.⁹⁷ He affirmed the standard distinction between the persons: “That the Father is said to Beget; the Son, to be Begotten; and the Holy-Ghost, to Proceed.” Although the full meaning of these distinctions cannot be known, Wallis affirmed that they ought to be believed since they are what God revealed in Scripture.⁹⁸ Wallis’ main contention in the debate, however, was to affirm that the Trinitarian doctrine of Scripture was in accord with sound reason: “there is no Impossibility, Non sense, or Inconsistence with Reason, that three somewhats (which we call Persons) may be One God.”⁹⁹

Wallis questioned Sherlock’s claims in his seventh letter, where he disagreed with his understanding of the Trinitarian distinctions of persons, saying he went beyond Scripture. He provided an irenic response, however, by charitably understanding

⁹⁵ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 109–14.

⁹⁶ Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:221. Dixon also made the following evaluative comments: “It was Sherlock’s inopportune use of the emergent category of ‘consciousness’ in relation to the persons of the Trinity that was to shatter the fragile unity of the trinitarian party”; “Sherlock’s apparent familiarity with the domestic life of the Trinity dismayed the orthodox and delighted their opponents. The novelty of the explanation, and the infelicities of the exposition, ricocheted around.” Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 110, 114.

⁹⁷ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 117; Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:205.

⁹⁸ John Wallis, *Theological Discourses Containing VIII Letters and III Sermons Concerning the Blessed Trinity* (London, 1692), Letter I, 3–5.

⁹⁹ Wallis, *Theological Discourses*, Letter IV, 14. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 99–100. Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:205–6.

Sherlock to uphold their common ground despite differences in their language. According to Wallis, Sherlock could give up some of his peculiar ways of speaking about the Trinitarian distinctions and still hold to the doctrine of the Trinity, making himself less susceptible to critiques by anti-Trinitarians.¹⁰⁰

Robert South (1634–1716) already despised Sherlock for taking the oaths of allegiance to William and Mary, despite the fact that South was not a Jacobite. He also despised Sherlock for his opposition to Calvinism. Thus, South did not moderate his response to Sherlock’s book titled, *Animadversions Upon Dr. Sherlock’s Book, Entitled A Vindication of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity* (1693).¹⁰¹ South was critical of Sherlock’s conception of Trinitarian unity and distinction in terms of “mutual-consciousness” and “self-consciousness,” which he considered an innovation, and instead made the case for traditional Trinitarian terminology. He also opposed Sherlock’s naïve trust in reason and hubristic ability to comprehend the mysteries of revelation through reason. Sherlock and South not only disagreed on the use of specific terms, but also on the role and efficacy of reason and mystery in divine revelation.¹⁰² When Sherlock responded in defense of his view, South again attacked him by accusing him of Tritheism.¹⁰³

These intramural Trinitarian firefights came at a cost and were continually taken advantage of by anti-Trinitarians:

¹⁰⁰ Wallis, *Theological Discourses*, Letter VII, 1–2, 17–19.

¹⁰¹ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 122–23. Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:210. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 93. Robert South, *Animadversions Upon Dr. Sherlock’s Book, Entitled A Vindication of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity, &c. Together With A More Necessary Vindication of That Sacred, and Prime Article of the Christian Faith from His New Notions, and False Explications of It. Humbly Offered to His Admirers, and to Himself Chief of Them*, 2nd ed. (London, 1693). South’s work went into a second edition in the same year, with “some additions” as indicated on the title page.

¹⁰² Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 123–25; Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:209–12; Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 94–99.

¹⁰³ Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 98–99.

The evident disagreement among the trinitarians was exploited ruthlessly by their opponents. Their differences in exposition and attacks upon each other did much to undermine the trinitarian claim that theirs was the universal and traditional faith of the Church. There appeared to be as many Trinities as there were writers, and one wit wrote that it was not difficult to know what Trinity to believe in as ‘there are so many wrong Trinities, and more everyday increasing.’¹⁰⁴

Nye continued to barrage the Trinitarian camp with devastating rhetorical flourish in his work in which he lambasted the main proponents of the Trinity. Nye exposed their fractured defense of the Trinity by claiming the following of South, Wallis, and Sherlock:

Dr. S—th’s Explication is only an absurd Socinianism; or Unitarianism disguised in a Metaphysical and Logical Cant. Dr. Wallis his Explication is an ingenious Sabellianism; and in very deed differs from Unitarianism, no more than Dr. S—th’s, that is to say, only in the wording. Dr. Sherlocks’s is such a flat Tritheism, that all the Learned of his own Part confess it to be so; and Dr. S—th hath written a very accurate Book to prove it so.¹⁰⁵

Nye’s assault on the Trinitarian camp was only one line of attack. During these debates, a wealthy London merchant by the name of Thomas Firmin (1632–1697) was funding the publication of Unitarian writings. Numerous Unitarian writings were collected into three series of tracts that were published during the 1690s.¹⁰⁶ Nye’s *Considerations* was a part of the second collection of these tracts.¹⁰⁷ In 1695, a third set of tracts was published that clearly set out the Unitarian scheme and also attempted “to

¹⁰⁴ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 125.

¹⁰⁵ [Stephen Nye], *Considerations on the Explications of the Doctrine of the Trinity by Dr. Wallis, Dr. Sherlock, Dr. S-Th, Dr. Cudworth, and Mr. Hooker as Also on the Account given by Those That Say the Trinity Is an Unconceivable and Inexplicable Mystery* (London, 1693), 32. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 102. In Dixon’s estimation, Nye’s potency derived not from his cogency, but from his rhetoric: “It is the power of Nye’s rhetoric, especially his ridicule, that still impresses the reader, rather than the force of his logical argument. His presentation of the writings of the trinitarian divines is partial and biased, but very effective. Each of the main players in the debate is put under the spotlight, interrogated very roughly, and then rendered ludicrous” (p. 126). See his overview: Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 125–129.

¹⁰⁶ According to Hunt, Biddle stayed with Firmin prior to his exile and “convinced Firmin that the unity of God is a unity of person as well as of nature.” The contents of these tracts are provided in Hunt’s “Appendix to Chapter IX.” Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:201–2, 273–75. McLachlan claimed that James II allowed Firmin’s publication of Nye’s *A Brief History* in 1687 “in order to call attention to the extremes to which Protestantism might lead and thus to discredit a faith which he and his friends were trying to subvert.” McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 321. Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 107, 115.

¹⁰⁷ Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:212.

refute every Trinitarian of every kind that had appeared in that age.”¹⁰⁸ It was appropriately titled *A Third Collection of Tracts, Proving The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only True God; and Jesus Christ the Son of God, him whom the Father sanctified and sent, raised from the Dead and exalted. And disproving the Doctrine of Three Almighty read subsisting Persons, Minds, or Spirits. Giving also an Account of the Nominal Trinity; that is, Three Modes, Subsistences, or Somewhats in God, called by Schoolmen Persons; and of the Judgement of the Fathers and Catholick Church for the first 150 Years.*¹⁰⁹

One of the works in this *Third Collection of Tracts* was written by Matthew Tindal (1655–1733), Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, and a leading deist, who “built on Nye’s foundations and showed popular perceptions of the main contours of the debate by 1694.”¹¹⁰ His work, *A Letter to the Reverend the Clergy of both Universities, Concerning the Trinity and the Athanasian Creed* contended that while the doctrine of the Trinity is considered “a Fundamental Article, and that Mens Salvation depends upon believing aright concerning the Persons, yet they extreamly differ about the meaning of the word *Person*.” According to Tindal, “A Man that is obliged to believe a thing, must first know what it is before he can believe it.” He argued that since one cannot understand the relationships between the three persons in God, believing in them is akin to a blind man believing in color. According to him, it “is the worst of idolatries.” For Tindal, a “person is a Term which we give to all intelligent Beings,” which is analogous to how humans and angels are understood. Christians thus have a similar conception of God: “so we have

¹⁰⁸ Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:215.

¹⁰⁹ *A Third Collection of Tracts Proving the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Only True God, and Jesus Christ the Son of God, Him Whom the Father Sanctified and Sent, Raised from the Dead and Exalted, and Disproving the Doctrine of Three Almighty, Real, Subsisting Persons, Minds, or Spirits : Giving Also an Account of the Nominal Trinity, That Is, Three Modes, Subsistences, or Somewhats in God, Called by Schoolmen Persons, and of the Judgement of the Fathers and Catholick Church for the First 150 Years* (1695).

¹¹⁰ Dixon provides a brief summary of this work: Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 130–31.

the same Idea of God, and a Divine Person; and God is in Holy Writ described as a Person: and as the Father (who is a Person) is God; so God, as appears by a great Number of Texts, is a Person, viz. the Father.” Since persons and beings refer to the same thing, “it is evident, how absurd it is to say a Divine Person is a Mode, an Attribute, a Property, or a Somewhat, &c.”¹¹¹

Tindal’s understanding of Person as substance was his starting point in engaging what he called “Nominal Trinitarians,” e.g., Robert South and John Wallis (he referred to William Sherlock as a “Real Trinitarian”). If a Person is a substance, it is contradictory to say that there are three persons in the one divine essence.¹¹² If the Trinitarians were right about there being three persons in one substance, “then the same substance is begotten, and unbegotten. . . self-existent and not self-existent. . . incarnate and not incarnate.” Asserting this, Tindal argued, would “destroy the Son and Spirit. . . which does necessarily destroy the Trinity, and the Doctrines depending upon it.” Tindal then moved to attack the Trinitarian notion of three modes of subsisting in the one divine nature as a contradictory and absurd metaphysical contrivance:

To be, is common to all things, it is the different ways of Being that makes the Difference between Things; and three different ways of Being makes three different Things. In short, none but a Metaphysician could have found out this Distinction of the fame Substance having three different Modes of subsisting, or being three different ways the fame, which is wholly unintelligible, and consequently impossible to be believed: It is a Multiplication without an Addition, for to be three, or three thousand ways the fame, adds nothing to a Being; for if it did, it would not be the fame: So to subtract from a Being all the different ways of being the fame, nothing is diminished from the Being which is still the fame; so that as one is a Multiplication without any Addition, the other is a Substraction without any Diminution.¹¹³

These as well as other assaults on Trinitarian orthodoxy began to concern the Church of England to the point that the Archbishop of Canterbury was compelled to urge

¹¹¹ Pages cited are those within Tindal’s letter within the collection of tracts. *A Third Collection of Tracts*, “A Letter,” 3–6; Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 130.

¹¹² *A Third Collection of Tracts*, “A Letter,” 10; Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 130.

¹¹³ *A Third Collection of Tracts*, “A Letter,” 10–12; Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 130.

the King to step in, which he did on February 3, 1695 by issuing *Directions to our Arch-Bishops and Bishops for the Preserving of Unity in the Church, and the Purity of Christian Faith, Concerning the Holy Trinity*.¹¹⁴ The *Directions* seemed to acknowledge the difficulty faced within the Church with regard to the Trinity, resulting from a variety of “ways of Expressing themselves” about the Trinity along with the spread of anti-Trinitarian writings. In response to this situation, the *Directions* were explicitly written to preserve the unity and purity of the Church of England.¹¹⁵ Written in four short articles, the first required preachers to teach what “what is contained in the Holy Scriptures, and is agreeable to the Three Creeds, and the Thirty-nine Articles.”¹¹⁶ The second article restrains the use of language to express the Trinity, directing preachers to “avoid all new Terms, and confine themselves to such ways of Expression as have been commonly used in the Church.” The *Directions*, then, in the third article, upheld previous church canon that prohibited “public Opposition between preachers” and states that “above all things, they abstain from bitter Invectives and Scurrilous Language against all persons whatsoever.” The fourth and final article applied these directions to all writings and non-preachers. It recognized the proliferation of anti-Trinitarian writing and called the clergy to utilize their lawful authority “for the Repressing and Restraining” of them.¹¹⁷

Knowing full well that the constant attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity and intramural debates between Trinitarians had taken a toll on the Church, Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699) wrote a learned and irenic defense of the Trinity that attempted

¹¹⁴ *Directions to Our Arch-Bishops and Bishops, for the Preserving of Unity in the Church, and the Purity of the Christian Faith, Concerning the Holy Trinity* (London, 1695). Please note that Dixon mistakenly attributed the date to 1696 rather than to 1695. Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 134.

¹¹⁵ *Directions*, 3–4.

¹¹⁶ *Directions*, 5, altered.

¹¹⁷ *Directions*, 5–7.

to demonstrate the unity among the Trinity's orthodox defenders.¹¹⁸ In so doing, he claimed the Trinitarians were agreed in the following:

there are three distinct persons in the Godhead. Secondly, they agree that the unity of God is not thereby impaired: there are no separate or separable substances in God. Thirdly, they all agree in believing that the divine essence is given to the Son from the Father, and to the Holy Spirit from both, and that the mode of the essence's communication establishes both the distinction and the unity of the divine persons.¹¹⁹

Despite Stillingfleet's defense and demonstration of unity, the encroachment of anti-Trinitarianism was confirmed by the Blasphemy Act of 1698, "which prescribed three years imprisonment for those convicted of anti-trinitarian belief." To the regret of the Trinitarians, however, "by then the damage had been well and truly done."¹²⁰

Samuel Clarke's (1675–1729) *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*

Although Samuel Clarke has been mostly recognized by history for his philosophy, he was ordained in the Church of England and was recognized as a top theologian. Clarke held the prominent position of Rector of St. James, Westminster, from 1709 until his death in 1729. Despite his early success as a theologian, Clarke's writing on the Trinity, beginning with the publication of his *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*,¹²¹ stirred no little controversy, which would follow him to his grave.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 143–44. Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 102–3.

¹¹⁹ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 145–46. We will see Gill waver from this last point, that eternal generation entails a communication of essence, although Gill clearly argued that eternal generation implied both unity of essence and distinction of persons.

¹²⁰ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 134.

¹²¹ Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity: In Three Parts: Wherein All the Texts in the New Testament Relating to That Doctrine, and the Principle Passages in the Liturgy of the Church of England, Are Collected, Compared, and Explained* (London: James Knapton, 1712).

¹²² Pfizenmaier's work provides an excellent introduction into Clarke's world and thought. Thomas C. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke (1675–1729): Context, Sources, and Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1–3.

Clarke's *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* was published first in 1712. He published a second edition in 1719. After his death, however, a third edition was published in 1732 from Clarke's final corrected copy, noted at the end of the Preface. Of its significance in the Trinitarian controversy, historians Abbey and Overton claimed that "We may take the appearance of Dr. Clarke's book as the commencement of a new era in this controversy, which after this time began to reach its zenith."¹²³ While Clarke collected many adversaries, his most important antagonist was Daniel Waterland (1683–1740), to whom "it remained. . . to take a comprehensive view of the whole question [about the Trinity], and to leave to posterity not only an effective answer to Dr. Clarke, but a masterly and luminous exposition, the equal to which it would be difficult to find in any other author, ancient or modern."¹²⁴ The debate between these two men has reminded some of the fourth-century debate between Arius and Athanasius, "If Clarke was perceived as the 'new Arius', it was Daniel Waterland who was acclaimed as 'another Athanasius.'"¹²⁵ While Waterland put forth a list of eleven points at which Clarke was out of step with the Ante-Nicene Fathers, he considered just two to be of supreme importance: consubstantiality and aseity. According to Waterland, Clarke rejected both consubstantiality and aseity.¹²⁶

¹²³ Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century: In Two Volumes* (London: Spottiswoode, 1878), 1:495. Godet concurs, terming the period from the publication of the *Scripture-Doctrine* (1712) until the year of Clarke's death (1729), the "second phase" of the Trinitarian controversy. Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 106.

¹²⁴ Abbey and Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, 1: 495. Pfizenmaier called Waterland "the most able participant in the trinitarian controversy." See Pfizenmaier for a broad look at the Trinitarian controversy related to Clarke in the eighteenth century, as well as a specific overview of Clarke's engagement with Waterland. In his main treatment of Clarke and Waterland (chapter 6), Pfizenmaier focuses on the two doctrines that Waterland claimed formed the most crucial difference between them: consubstantiality and aseity. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke*, 189, 179–216. See also Godet's treatments of both Clarke and Waterland; Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 107–11, 116–20. Dixon titled one of his chapters after Clarke's work, "The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity," and dedicates a large part to Clarke and Waterland. Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 183–207.

¹²⁵ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 196.

¹²⁶ See Pfizenmaier's specific treatment of these two issues. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke*, 199–216.

Clarke's bombshell *Scripture-Doctrine* consisted in three parts. The first contained a collection of all the New Testament texts that Clarke regarded as related to the Trinity. In the second part he expounded his trinitarian doctrine through a series of fifty-five propositions. The last section, which highlights Clarke's concern for correct doctrine and its application to worship, examined passages in the Church of England's Liturgy that related to the Trinity.

Clarke's introductory remarks in *Scripture-Doctrine* displayed his earnestness concerning the matter of the Trinity when he wrote, "The Subject of the following Papers, is a Doctrine of the greatest Importance in Religion; a Matter not to be treated of slightly and carelessly, as it were by accident only, after manner of superficial controversies about Words, or of particular occasional questions concerning the meaning of single ambiguous Texts."¹²⁷ Clarke demonstrated Protestant conviction, giving final authority to Scripture in questions of revealed truth. He denied an equal authority to tradition and affirmed, "Wherefore in any Question of Controversy in a Matter of Faith, Protestants are obliged (for the deciding of it) to have recourse to no other Authority whatsoever, but to that of Scripture only."¹²⁸

For Clarke, the essence of the Trinitarian confession is this: "The Supremacy of God the Father over all, and our Reconciliation and Subjection to him as such our Supreme Governour; the Redemption purchased by the Son; and the Sanctification worked in us by the Holy Spirit; are the Three Great Articles of our Creed." Clarke, as stated above, believed this confession had practical implications for life and worship as he continued, "And in maintaining these rightly, so as seriously to affect mens Understandings, and influence their Lives accordingly; is the Honour of God, and the Interest of True Religion greatly concerned." Clarke contrasted his doctrine with

¹²⁷ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, A2.

¹²⁸ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, x.

tritheism, Sabellianism, Arianism, and Socinianism, saying they have harmed true Christianity through “speculative disputes.”¹²⁹ Clarke intentionally positioned his *Scripture-Doctrine* as a safe middle-ground that avoided the extremes of Socinianism and Arianism on the one hand, and Sabellianism and Tritheism on the other:

. . . on the one hand, men by guarding unwarily against Tritheism, have often in the other extreme run into Socinianism, to the diminution of the Honour of the Son of God, and to the taking away the very Being of the Holy Spirit; so on the contrary, in cautious Writers in their zeal against Socinianism and Arianism, have no less frequently laid themselves open to Sabellianism or Tritheism, by neglecting to maintain the Honour and Supremacy of the Father. The Design of the following Papers, is to show how This Evil may be prevented, and in what manner Both Extremes may rationally be avoided.¹³⁰

Whereas the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ stood at the center of Gill’s Trinitarian theology, the ontological and doxological supremacy of the Father stood at the center of Clarke’s Trinitarian theology. Clarke began the second part of his *Scripture-Doctrine* by affirming that “There is One Supreme Cause and Original of Things; One simple, uncompounded, undivided, intelligent Being, or Person; who is the Author of all Being, and the Fountain of all Power,” whom Clarke identified as the Father. Although the Father is the supreme being, the Son and the Spirit, each of whom he identified as a “divine Person,” had “existed from the Beginning.” The supremacy of the Father is further elaborated in affirmation V, in which Clarke stated, “The Father (or First Person) Alone is Self-existent, Underived, Unoriginated, Independent; made of None, begotten of None, Proceeding from None.” He is, Clarke affirmed in article VI, “the Sole Origin of all Power and Authority, and is the Author and Principle of whatsoever is done by the Son or by the Spirit.” Clarke’s seventh proposition taught that the “Father alone is in the highest, strict, proper, and absolute sense supreme over all.” The Father additionally is the “God of the Universe,” the “one God,” and “the only God.” In sum, “Scripture, when

¹²⁹ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, xxvii.

¹³⁰ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, xxxvii–xxxviii.

it mentions God, absolutely and by way of eminence, always means the person of the Father.”¹³¹

Clarke’s view of the Son allowed for distinction of person, but subordination with respect to the Son’s nature, work, and worship. Clarke circumspectly referenced the divine nature of the Father and Son (and Spirit), stating that Scripture distinguishes them “always by their personal characters, offices, power and attributes.”¹³² Explaining his ninth proposition, “The Scripture, when it mentions the One God, or the Only God, always means the Supreme Person of the Father,” Clarke stated that “The Reason is; because the Words, One and Only, are used by way of Eminence, to signifie Him who is absolutely Supreme, Self-existent, and Independent; which Attributes are Personal, and evidently impossible to be communicated from one Person to another.” Clark was far, then, from affirming consubstantiality and took the attributes of self-existence and independence to be incommunicable and individual to the Father alone.¹³³ By contrast to the Father’s supremacy and self-sufficiency, Clarke asserted that the Son is subordinate and completely dependent upon the Father for his existence in proposition XII, “The Son (or second Person) is not Self-existent, but derives his Being or Essence, and All his Attributes, from the Father, as from the Supreme Cause.” The nature of this derivation, however, cannot be known, nor should Christians attempt to explain it. Generation, Clarke wrote, “when applied to God, is but a figurative Word; signifying only in general,

¹³¹ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 241–45, 265.

¹³² “What the proper Metaphysical Nature, Essence, or Substance of any of these divine Persons is, the Scripture has no where at all declared . . .” (§IV); “In what particular Metaphysical Manner the Son derives his Being or Essence from the Father, the Scripture has no where distinctly declared; and therefore men ought not to presume to be able to define” (§XIII); “The Son, whatever his metaphysical Essence or Substance be, and whatever divine Greatness and Dignity is ascribed to him in Scripture . . .” (§XXXIV); “The Son, whatever his metaphysical Nature or Essence be . . .” (§XXXVI). Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 243, 272, 304, 322.

¹³³ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 245.

immediate derivation of Being from God himself.”¹³⁴ This derivation, contrary to Arianism, does not mean “that there was a time when the Son was not.” Instead, the Scripture “always supposes and affirms him to have existed with the Father from the beginning and before all worlds.”¹³⁵ While Clarke’s first edition of *Scripture-Doctrine* asserted that Scripture does not determine whether this derivation is by the necessity of the Father’s nature or his own will, he strongly leaned toward the latter position. His second and third editions, however, asserted that the Son derives from the Father “not by mere Necessity of Nature, (which would be in reality Self-existence, not Filiation;) but by an Act of the Father’s incomprehensible Power and Will.”¹³⁶

Seeking to avoid the idea that the Son’s appellation as the Word made him a mere attribute, Clarke affirmed that it established the Son as a distinct person whose function it is to reveal the will of the Father. This name for the Son by no means hinted at a consubstantial nature and personal distinction with the Father:

The [Λόγος, the] Word or Son of the Father, sent into the World to assume our Flesh, and die for the Sins of Mankind; was not the [λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, the] internal Reason or Wisdom of God, and Attribute or Power of the Father; but a real person, the same who from the Beginning had been the Word, or Revealer of the Will, of the Father to the world.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ “In what particular Metaphysical Manner the Son derives his Being or Essence from the Father, the Scripture has no where distinctly declared; and therefore men ought not to presume to be able to define” (§XIII). Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 270, 272.

¹³⁵ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 279.

¹³⁶ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 280. Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity. Wherein Every Text in the New Testament Relating to That Doctrine, Is Distinctly Considered; and the Divinity of Our Blessed Saviour According to the Scriptures, Proved and Explained.*, 2nd ed. (London, 1719), 246. Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity. Wherein Every Text in the New Testament Relating to That Doctrine, Is Distinctly Considered; and the Divinity of Our Blessed Saviour According to the Scriptures, Proved and Explained.* 3rd ed. (London, 1732), 274–75. Please note that any further citations of *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* are taken from Clarke’s first edition (1712).

¹³⁷ In his notes on this section, Clarke wrote, “Of the Writers before the Time of the Council of Nice, Theophilus, Tatian and Athenagoras, seem to have been of That Opinion, that [the λόγος] the Word, was [the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος] the internal Reason or Wisdom of the Father; and yet, at the same time, they speak as if they supposed That Word to be produced or generated into a real Person. Which is hardly intelligible: and seems to be the Mixture of Two Opinions: The One, of the generality of Christians; who believed the Word to be a real Person: The Other, of the Jews and Jewish Christians; who Personated the

Clark maintained not only that the Son's existence was owing to the Father, but that his every work was as well. Creation, as well as all the Son's other actions in the world, are "entirely directed" and empowered by the Father and for the Father's glory.¹³⁸ And while the Son (and Spirit) receives a degree of worship, the Father is the ultimate object of worship:

§XLIII. Upon These Grounds, absolutely Supreme Honour is due to the Person of the Father singly, as being Alone the Supreme Author of all Being and Power.

§XLIV. For the same Reason, all Prayers and Praises ought primarily or ultimately to be directed to the Person of the Father, as the Original and Primary Author of all Good.¹³⁹

As will be seen, whereas Gill posited personal distinction and ontological equality within the one divine nature by virtue of eternal generation, Clarke posited personal distinction and ontological subordination by virtue of the Son's derivation from the Father.

Salter's Hall (1719) and the Issue of Doctrinal Subscription

The Trinitarian battles of the 1690s that flowed into the eighteenth century, outlined above, largely involved ministers and theologians in the Church of England. It is necessary, however, to give brief attention to the state of Trinitarian theology among Dissenting congregations, most notably in the events at Salter's Hall in 1719, which some look back upon as emblematic of a trajectory of decline within some Dissenting denominations in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁰

internal Wisdom of God, or spake of it figuratively (according to the Geniis of their language) as of a Person." Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 287–88.

¹³⁸ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 297, 313, 322, 330.

¹³⁹ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 352, 354.

¹⁴⁰ Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1, *From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (1978; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 375–76. Cf. Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, A History of the English Baptists, vol. 2 (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 22–23. David W. Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 67–68. Copson wrote that "whilst many observers have seen this as a

The Salter's Hall meeting of 1719 was born out of an inquiry from ministers in Exeter to London about how to deal with a fellow ministers who were suspected of heterodox views of the Trinity. The episode also bears witness to the influence of Samuel Clarke among the Dissenters. Chief among those under suspicion was James Peirce, a Presbyterian minister in Exeter, who had become sympathetic to Samuel Clarke's views of the Trinity after reading the *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*. He and two other Exeter ministers, including Joseph Hallet who ran an academy, were put under suspicion after they wrote a recommendation letter for ordination on behalf of Hubert Stogdon, who was also persuaded of Clarke's view of the Trinity. Additionally, Peirce had foregone giving the doxology at the end of prayers because he believed it was unscriptural and people in Exeter thought Hallet's academy was the source of Trinitarian heterodoxy. Peirce, Hallet, and two other ministers were then called to give an account for their beliefs. Their doing so before the Exeter Assembly (also referred to as The United Ministers of Devon and Cornwall) did not quell the Assembly's apprehension about the spread of Arianism. Another committee at Exeter that oversaw the town's three meeting houses, known as "The Thirteen," thought the ministers' response to doctrinal questions "had not been wholly satisfactory" and wrote on November 22, 1718, to a group of Dissenting pastors in London for advice in resolving the matter. The initial response from London on January 6 was to defer the matter back to "trusted senior ministers in their own neighborhood, who, with their more intimate knowledge of the circumstance than Londoners could command, would be better able to advise." Thus, The Thirteen called together a group of seven West Country pastors, known as "The Seven." The Seven held an initial meeting and planned a second. In the meantime, they heard back from those in

watershed moment for General Baptists, it was in fact one episode in a century-long conversation." Copson may be right, that it was not a "watershed" event, but it was certainly a revealing episode, standing as emblematic of both General Baptist past and future. See more below on this point. Stephen L. Copson, "General Baptists in the Eighteenth Century," in *Challenge and Change: English Baptist Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Stephen L. Copson and Peter J. Morden (Didcot, UK: Baptist Historical Society, 2017), 48.

London who indicated that they had asked the Committee of the Three Denominations to give advice. Although the Committee in London requested that the Seven cease their work in the matter, they forged ahead with their advice, which they gave to the Thirteen on March 4. The result was that the Thirteen “asked their four Exeter ministers to fall into line with the orthodox requirements expressed [by the Seven].” Of the four, Peirce and Hallet rejected the directive, while the other two complied. Subsequently, Peirce and Hallet’s church meeting houses were shut down. Although Peirce and Hallet were left to put together another church meeting, which comprised around three hundred people, their refusal to comply with the Thirteen’s directive was vindicated by the advice of those in London. The advice from the General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in London “was markedly at variance with the course that had been taken [in Exeter by the Thirteen].”¹⁴¹

The meeting in London, which included Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists (both General and Particular Baptists), sought to speak to the situation at Exeter. This group of Dissenting pastors met on February 19 and 24, 1719, at Salters’ Hall in London to discuss the advice they would send to Exeter. The debate at Salters’ Hall came down to the issue of subscription, with specific concern for the doctrine of the Trinity. One side, to preserve orthodoxy, insisted on subscription, while the other side argued that Scripture-words only should be the standard of orthodoxy:

The most controverted Part, in the Course of these Proceedings, was with relation to some Points of Faith; and particularly the Doctrine of the Trinity. By some it was judged necessary to be express upon the main Articles of the Christian Religion, as set forth in some Creeds, Catechisms, &. In order to justify the Purity, and Orthodoxy of their Faith; but these were opposed by others, who were for enlarging the Conditions of Communion, so far, as to affect none of the same Faith in Essentials, but only Cases of Imorality, and the like; who were for having only the inspired Writings, in the very Letter thereof, to be made a Standard of Faith, and a Test of Church Membership; and who were equally against all Forms,

¹⁴¹ This paragraph draws from the following sources: Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1:374. Roger Thomas, “The Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: The Salters’ Hall Debate,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4, no. 2 (July 1953): 162–66. Jesse Franklin Owens, “The Salter’s Hall Controversy of 1719” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 40–48.

Interpretations, or Dictates of fallible Men, in Matters of so great Consequence, and what regarded eternal Salvation.¹⁴²

Those advocating subscription thought that rejecting a confessional standard was a “virtual” denial of Trinitarian orthodoxy, while those against subscription argued the contrary and insisted “that the Question to be put, was only, Whether any humane Interpretations thereof should be made a Test of Christian Communion, or the Form of Expression only made use of in the inspired Writings.”¹⁴³ It was only “After a great deal of Bustle, Heat, Invective, and over-bearing Treatment, the Question was, with great difficulty, put, as before limited [to subscription to the doctrine of the Trinity].” After a vote, “the Affirmatives were 53, and the Negatives 57, so that it was carried by a Majority that no humane Compositions, or Interpretations of the Doctrine of the Trinity, should be made a Part of those Articles of Advice, they were met to draw up, and agree to.”¹⁴⁴

Another meeting was held at Salters Hall on March 3, which further illustrated the divide between Subscribers and Non-Subscribers.¹⁴⁵ The Subscribers, who were in the minority, broke off from the meeting and signed a Trinitarian confession, while the majority continued to work on their advice to Exeter. Finally, after another meeting on March 10, seventy-three Non-Subscribers yielded the following recommendations to Exeter, sent March 17:

IV. If after all, a publick Hearing be insisted on, we think the Protestant Principle, that the Bible is the only and the perfect Rule of Faith, obliges those who have the Case before them, not to condemn any Man upon the Authority of Humane Decisions, or because he consents not to Humane Forms or Phrases: But then only is

¹⁴² Anon., *An Account of the Late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers at Salter's-Hall*, 3rd ed. (London, 1719), 6. Thomas, “The Non-Subscription Controversy,” 165–72. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1:374–75.

¹⁴³ Anon., *An Account*, 7–8.

¹⁴⁴ Anon., *An Account*, 10.

¹⁴⁵ Watts noted that it was when “the defeated minority subscribed their names to a Trinitarian declaration which led henceforward to the two sides being known as Subscribers and Non-subscribers.” Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1:375. I will, thus, use this terminology for the following descriptions of these events.

He to be censured, *as not holding the Faith necessary to Salvation*, when it appears that he contradicts, or refuses to own, the plain and express Declarations of Holy Scripture, in what is there made necessary to be believed, and in Matters there solely revealed. And we trust that All will treat the Servants of their common Lord, as they who expect the final Decision at his appearing.¹⁴⁶

While the Non-Subscribers sent their advice and stated that “we utterly disown the Arian Doctrine, and sincerely believe the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and the proper Divinity of our Lord Jesus,”¹⁴⁷ Michael Watts recorded that “in time the fears of the Subscribers that the attitude adopted by the Non-Subscribers would lead to Unitarianism were justified.”¹⁴⁸ While many of the Non-Subscribers at Salter’s Hall were orthodox Trinitarians,¹⁴⁹ the Subscribers’ fears were justified since those denominations that predominately supported non-subscription, namely Presbyterians and General Baptists, become Unitarian.¹⁵⁰ In this way, Salters’ Hall has stood as a “symbol” of future decline in Trinitarian orthodoxy.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Anon., *An Authentick Account of Several Things Done and Agreed Upon by the Dissenting Ministers Lately Assembled at Salters-Hall* (London, 1719), 7–9. Thomas, “The Non-Subscription Controversy,” 172–75.

¹⁴⁷ Anon., *An Authentick Account*, 15, emphasis original.

¹⁴⁸ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1:375.

¹⁴⁹ Owens argues that most of the Non-Subscribers were orthodox. He also stated that those who did embrace heterodoxy “were almost exclusively Non-subscribers.” In Owens’ words, “The number of outright heterodox ministers listed among the Non-subscribers is quite small even when one takes into account a given minister embracing heterodoxy in the decades after Salters’ Hall. In other words, examining those ministers who clearly affirmed some form of anti-Trinitarianism, such as a subordinationist Christology, reveals very few ministers of this variety among the Non-subscribers. Of course, those ministers who did embrace heterodoxy at some point were almost exclusively Non-subscribers.” Owens, “The Salter’s Hall Controversy of 1719,” 14–15, 83, 119.

¹⁵⁰ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1:375–76.

¹⁵¹ Owens concludes that the “latitudinarian spirit” at the Salters’ Hall meetings, despite the presence of Non-Subscribing orthodox Trinitarians, created an opportunity for the rise of heterodoxy in the eighteenth century: “The case for the majority of the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall being theologically orthodox regarding the doctrine of the Trinity but opposed to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases, is strong. There certainly were some anti-Trinitarians at Salters’ Hall. The decades following Salters’ Hall saw an increase of anti-Trinitarianism throughout England, particularly in the Church of England, among the Presbyterians, and among the General Baptists. Yet the proliferation of anti-Trinitarianism in the decades following Salters’ Hall does not necessarily entail a wholesale theological deviation from the doctrine of the Trinity among the Non-subscribers. The history of eighteenth-century English Dissent proves that this latitudinarian spirit, which pervaded Salters’ Hall, did open the door even wider for theological deviation. The *sola Scriptura* principle, which was in many cases more akin to *nuda Scriptura*, could not stem the rising tide of heterodoxy. No matter how well-intended the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall were, if they hoped to maintain any sort of theological orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, their categorical opposition to subscription proved unwise.” Owens, “The

It is well-documented that General Baptists did not fare well during the eighteenth century with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity. The General Baptists' decades-long failure to deal effectively with the errant Christological teachings of Matthew Caffyn proved to be a bleak sign of their Trinitarian conviction.¹⁵² Furthermore, their methods for resolving these tensions within the General Baptist Assembly served as a prediction of the General Baptist allegiance towards non-subscription at Salters' Hall. This prediction was evidenced in the General Assembly's decision to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology "in Scripture words and terms and in no other terms."¹⁵³ It was no surprise, then, when the number of General Baptists who aligned with the Non-Subscribers (14) dwarfed the number of those who aligned with the Subscribers (1).¹⁵⁴ As Brown observed, "In several instances, resistance to subscription became the prelude to heterodoxy. People who refused to sign the articles came eventually to deny them and those General Baptists who were theologically uncertain ultimately became committed Unitarians."¹⁵⁵

Salter's Hall Controversy of 1719," 83. Owens also mentioned that "Most theologically conservative scholars in the twentieth century viewed the event as a symbol of theological decline among the English General Baptists and Presbyterians at the beginning of the eighteenth century" (p. 5). This dissertation takes the position that the events of Salter's Hall were symbolic of *future* decline in Trinitarian orthodoxy.

¹⁵² See Brown, *English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, 20–23. See also Clint C. Bass' recent volume outlining the controversy dealing with Matthew Caffyn. I am deeply grateful for many conversations with Dr. Bass on this and other related issues. Clint C. Bass, *The Caffynite Controversy*, Centre for Baptist Studies in Oxford Publications 19 (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2020). While Copson provided a more sympathetic assessment, his essay nevertheless takes notice of General Baptist decline, which, in some measure was owing to heterodox Trinitarian belief. Copson, "General Baptists in the Eighteenth Century," 29–55.

¹⁵³ Brown, *English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, 22. Bass argues that what occurred at Salters' Hall had precedent among General Baptists, and was indicative of a growing anti-confessionalism and tolerance for heterodox Trinitarianism during the eighteenth century. Bass, *The Caffynite Controversy*, 33–88.

¹⁵⁴ W. T. Whitley, "Salters' Hall 1719 and the Baptists," *Baptist Historical Society* 5 (1915): 189.

¹⁵⁵ Brown, *English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, 22–23. Copson's helpful, and sympathetic assessment of General Baptist decline largely affirms the findings of Brown and Bass. While arguing that the decline of General Baptists "is more complex than a single cause," i.e., heterodox Trinitarianism, he nevertheless stated that "the appearance of views moving away from traditional convictions became more accepted as the century progressed, and, at a time when churches traditionally orthodox declined in influence or died out, it may have left the impression that the whole movement inexorably shifted. Notwithstanding *as the eighteenth century drew to a close, it is harder to find General*

The English counterpart to the General Baptists, the Particular Baptists, fared well by comparison in their commitment to the Trinity. As Salters' Hall was symbolic of future General Baptist weakness with respect to the Trinity, it was symbolic of Particular Baptist strength as those in favor of subscription over non-subscription numbered fourteen to two. Joseph Ivimey's description of the Salters' Hall fallout is instructive:

It is worthy of observation, as it respects the non-subscribers among the Baptists, that the churches to which they belonged, have become extinct; or, if there are any vestiges of them remaining, those who compose them are found marshalled under the banner of Socinus. The truth of the gospel has not continued with them; and these remarks are applicable to all the Presbyterian churches. It is pleasant also to remark, that most of the Particular Baptist ministers in London were so zealous for the doctrine of the Trinity, and the proper divinity of the Lord Jesus, as to subscribe with their hands what they believed in their hearts; thus contributing to stem the torrent which threatened to deluge the whole of the Dissenting churches.¹⁵⁶

John Gill followed in the example of the subscribing Particular Baptists at Salters' Hall and has been credited for maintaining Trinitarian orthodoxy among Particular Baptists as the eighteenth century wore on. His defense and advocacy of extra-biblical terminology, as well as confessions, were thus critical.¹⁵⁷ Having been called to pastor at Horsleydown in September, 1719, it is unlikely that Gill was unaware of the events at Salters' Hall, especially since John Skepp (1675–1721), who presided

Baptist churches that had withstood the drift towards less than orthodox convictions" (emphasis mine). In a telling anecdote at the end of the chapter, Copson quoted "the Unitarian missionary Richard Wright," who in the 1820s stated that "So far from Unitarian churches declining, or Unitarianism, being the cause of the declension and decay of any of our churches, either Baptist or Presbyterian, I know of no instance of such declension and decay having taken place where Unitarianism has been openly avowed and preached in a plain and popular style, as the doctrine of the Gospel." That these Unitarian congregations had full pews would be beside the point to Orthodox Trinitarians. That Baptists would avow such views would itself be indicative of decline. Copson, "General Baptists in the Eighteenth Century," 50, 54, 55.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:166. Thomas, "The Non-Subscription Controversy," 189.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 1, *Beginnings in Britain* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 214, 215–16. While not speaking solely of Gill's Trinitarian theology, the following statements by Nettles are apt: "Much of the credit for this unswerving allegiance [noted by John C. Ryland in 1777] to the doctrine of Scripture, under God, must be attributed to John Gill, known affectionately as 'Dr. Voluminous.'" And in conclusion, Nettles wrote: "And perhaps, rather than imputing blame upon Gill for the leanness of the times, he should be credited with preserving gospel purity, which eventuated in the efforts to use means for the conversion of the heathen." Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 21, 54.

over Gill's ordination in March of 1720, was among the Subscribers.¹⁵⁸ Gill also, at some point in his life, acquired a copy of the sermons given at Salters' Hall.¹⁵⁹ It is no surprise, then, that Gill on multiple occasions defended the use of traditional Trinitarian terminology and affirmed the necessity of confessions.¹⁶⁰

In Gill's *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, he addressed the use of non-Scriptural words head-on. He highlighted that opponents of the Trinity do not use these words "because they are not literally, and syllabically expressed in scripture." Gill's argument, then, is that although the words themselves are not used, the concepts to which they point are present: "But since we have the things themselves signified by them, why we should scruple the use of the words, I see not."¹⁶¹ Gill then provided a defense of four crucial terms: Trinity, Unity, Essence, Person, spending by far the most time on the term "Person." Gill himself did not feel personally "attached" to the term person, and would

¹⁵⁸ John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1992), 12; Whitley, "Salters' Hall 1719 and the Baptists," 181. Gill had a "brief association" with Skepp, according to Robert Oliver. With the help of the Particular Baptist Fund, he was able to purchase his library which helped spur him on in his study of ancient Hebrew texts. Robert W. Oliver, "John Gill (1697–1771): His Life and Ministry," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 16–18. Rathel connects Gill closely with Skepp to argue the latter's influence on Gill's soteriology: "John Skepp provides an even clearer link between Gill and hyper-Calvinism. Skepp left Hussey's Cambridge congregation due to his Baptist convictions, and he eventually ministered to a Particular Baptist church in Cripple Gate, London. While in London, Skepp formed a close relationship with Gill." David Rathel, "A Pastor-Theologian in Search of a Faith Worthy of All Acceptation: The Theological Genealogy of Andrew Fuller and His Critique of It" (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2018), 56; Hong-Gyu Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)" (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2001), 33–34.

¹⁵⁹ "A Catalogue of the Library of the Late Reverend and Learned John Gill, D.D. Deceased. Comprehending a Fine Collection of Biblical and Oriental Literature" (unpublished manuscript, Cambridge, 1772), 10.

¹⁶⁰ John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc'd into the Form of a Treatise*, 2nd ed. (Southwark, England: George Keith, 1752), 46–51. John Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, 1839 ed. (repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), xxxix–xli. See Godet's helpful analysis here: Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 208–10. According to Nettles, "Gill observed the eventual effects of the non-subscribers element in the controversy [at Salters' Hall] and clearly sided with the subscribers on this issue. He often defended the usefulness of confessions of faith and the necessity of clarifying one's position on Scripture meaning by using other than Scripture words." Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:207. Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 22–24.

¹⁶¹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 46–46.

use a different word if there was another that taught the biblical doctrine that it expressed.¹⁶² He thought it “an apparent weakness,” however, to forgo not only a replacement term, but a term that was actually better. Gill understood well that it was difficult to speak of these deep divine realities, but he knew full well that the use of words mattered: “It is a rule, that in many instances holds good: *Quisingit nova verba, nova gigit dogmata*; he that coins new words, coins new doctrines.” Gill humbly committed himself to speaking about God as best as was humanly possible for the sake of preserving right doctrine: “If we cannot speak of God as he should be spoken of, let us speak of him as we can. If we cannot speak with the tongue of angels, let us speak as men, in the best and most becoming way we are able.”¹⁶³

In the introduction to his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill sought to vindicate his theological project of putting doctrines together into a systematic, cohesive whole—a “body” of divinity—knowing full well that the practice was out of vogue at that time.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, he also felt compelled to argue biblically for the validity of articles, confessions, and the rule of faith, concluding that,

Upon the whole, it seems no ways incongruous with the sacred writings, but perfectly agreeable to them, that articles and heads of faith, or a summary of gospel truths, may be collected from them, to declare explicitly our belief of them, to strengthen the faith of others in them, to shew our agreement in them with other Christians in the principal parts of them, and to distinguish ourselves from those who oppose the faith once delivered to the saints.¹⁶⁵

In doing so he took particular care to address the use of extra-biblical words. Most basically, he said that “our sense of them [the Scriptures] cannot be expressed but in words literally varyng from them.”¹⁶⁶ To constrain oneself to Scripture-terms only would

¹⁶² Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 46–50.

¹⁶³ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 50.

¹⁶⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xxxv–xxxvii.

¹⁶⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xxxv–xxxix.

¹⁶⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xxxix.

“destroy all exposition and interpretation of Scripture,” would make preaching futile, and would “cramp all religious conversation about divine things, if not destroy it.”¹⁶⁷ Gill was fond of a passage in John Owen’s (1616–1683) *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, quoting it in both his *Doctrine of the Trinity* and *Body of Divinity*.¹⁶⁸ In the passage, Owen forced the logic of those who demanded use of Scripture-terms only to argue that if one is bound to use Scripture-terms only in written or spoken word, so also must one’s thoughts be bound to Scripture-terms alone:

And to deny the Liberty, yea, the necessity hereof, is to deny all Interpretation of the Scripture, all endeavours to express the sense of the words of it, unto the understandings of one another; which is in a word to render the Scripture it self altogether useless. For if it be unlawful for me to speak or write what I conceive to be the sense of the Words of the Scripture, and the nature of the thing signified and expressed by them, it is unlawful for me also to think or conceive in my mind, what is the sense of the words or nature of the things; which to say, is to make Brutes of our selves, and to frustrate the whole design of God in giving unto us the great privilege of his Word.¹⁶⁹

Gill realized the importance of extra-biblical terms for discerning truth from error. Without them, Gill wrote, “so an Arian cannot be known from an Athanasian, but will say, in the words of Scripture, that Christ is the *great God*, the *true God*, and *over all God blessed for ever*; but without expressing themselves in their own words, their different sentiments will not be discerned.”¹⁷⁰ Gill also argued that far from having a greater respect for Scripture, some of those who have laid claim to such a strict manner of speaking taught with little reference to Scripture. Moreover, Gill claimed that in various historical instances, extra-biblical terms were used to “explain” and “defend” the doctrines taught in Scripture. Gill stated the warrant for the use of such terms concisely when he wrote, “Words and phrases though not literally expressed in scripture, yet if

¹⁶⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xxxix.

¹⁶⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 50–51. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xl.

¹⁶⁹ John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity: As Also of the Person and Satisfaction of Christ*, Third Impression (London, 1676), 21.

¹⁷⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xl.

what is meant by them is to be found there, they may be lawfully made use of.”¹⁷¹ Not only that, these terms, which carry the weight of historical precedence, familiarity, and clarity should not be quickly discarded.¹⁷²

That Gill held these convictions as vital to Christian life and ministry is beyond dispute, as Gill delivered these same ideas, in a very similar fashion, during an ordination sermon for the Baptist minister, John Reynolds (1730–1792), on 2 Timothy 1:13, titled, “The Form of sound Words to be held fast.”¹⁷³

John Gill’s Pastoral Response to Trinitarian Error

John Gill, like every pastor, ministered in a specific place and time. That specific space and time in England happened to be a period in which enlightenment thinking prompted new challenges to traditional Christian thought. This period of enlightenment resulted in assaults on the doctrine of the Trinity, most specifically the eternal Sonship of Christ. Gill’s writings on this doctrine demonstrate that he was following the pattern set by Reformed orthodox theologians before him.¹⁷⁴ Van Asselt’s

¹⁷¹ Gill highlighted various terms, but most notably those that deal with the doctrine of the Trinity, i.e., “nature,” “Godhead,” “Person,” “essence,” “unity,” “Trinity,” and “generation.” He accused Arians, Socinians, and Remonstrants of “making use of unscriptural” terms. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xli.

¹⁷² “And indeed, words and phrases, the use of which have long obtained in the churches of Christ, and the sense of them, is well known, and serve aptly to convey the sense of those that use them; it is unreasonable to require them to part with them, unless others, and those better words and phrases, are substituted in their room; and such as are proposed should not be easily admitted without strict examination;” Gill then repeated a phrase used in his *The Doctrine of the Trinity* about the potential dangers of new terms, “for there is oftentimes a good deal of truth in that saying, *qui singit nova verba, nova gignit dogmata*; he that coins new words, coins new doctrines.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xli.

¹⁷³ The sermon may be found here: John Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (London: George Keith, 1773), 2:49–64. See also the treatment of this sermon in the following: Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:215–16. Thomas J. Nettles, “John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening,” in Haykin, *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 143. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 209.

¹⁷⁴ Van Asselt briefly noted that the Socinian denial of key Scriptural doctrines, such as the “Trinity, divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, the imputation of Christ’s obedience to justification, the power of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Furthermore, he noted that the Socinians “drew heavy resistance and were attacked by countless representatives of Reformed theology. As a result one can notice a response to Socinian theology in almost every locus of the systems of high orthodoxy.” Willem J. van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 135–37. Park has briefly and helpfully shown how Gill’s *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*

assertion about the Reformed theologians of “high orthodoxy” (ca. 1620–1700), that “[t]hey did not work in a theological vacuum but reacted to actual topics and movements in the church and theology of their time” is no less true for John Gill.¹⁷⁵ His concerns about the doctrine of the Trinity were not only rooted in his exegetical and theological conclusion about what Scripture taught, but were magnified by the practical situation in which he found himself. That situation, characterized by the erosion of Trinitarian doctrine, required Gill to address the subject accordingly. For Gill, that meant tackling Trinitarian error primarily from an ecclesial context. Gill’s main audience was not the academy. Rather, his ecclesial context distinguished his writings from other Protestant scholastics whose works are characterized by a higher level of technical presentation of scholastic terms and distinctions which owed to their academic context. To take nothing away from the substance of Gill’s writings, his scholastic approach was adapted to a manner suitable for the benefit of his congregation and other interested Christians and church leaders.¹⁷⁶ Park’s description of Gill’s context and method will help to further illuminate Gill’s use of Reformed scholastic theology in his pastoral context:

[I]t is important to know that Gill was developing his system for the people of a specific group, namely, the Calvinistic Independents and, principally, the Particular Baptists under his care, rather than general readers. Reformed or Lutheran divines in

firmly placed him within the Reformed scholastic tradition. Park, “Grace and Nature,” 61–64. See also Park’s sections on Gill’s doctrine of the Trinity, in which Park locates Gill within this Reformed tradition at various points. Park concludes that Gill was “heavily dependent upon the Protestant, and chiefly, Reformed sources in developing his systematic treatment of the Trinity.” Park, “Grace and Nature,” 49–50, 233–58. Muller specifically referenced Gill as a “late orthodox” theologian. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:120.

¹⁷⁵ Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 137.

¹⁷⁶ Park aptly wrote that Gill “softened scholasticism in order to accommodate his readers.” Park, “Grace and Nature,” 15. Muller has noticed this same phenomenon, but provides a different reasons for it: “The tone of Gill’s statements again points toward the eighteenth-century distaste for and critique of traditional orthodox or ‘scholastic’ theology, particularly toward what might be called the extreme Pietist critique, according to which the whole academic discipline of ‘theology’ or ‘divinity’ was called into question on purportedly biblical grounds.” And again: “As in his discussion of the forms of revelation, Gill tends to simplify scholastic Protestant dogmatic structure by omitting reference to the technical terminology and scholastic distinctions, but he nonetheless preserves much of the substance of the doctrine. In a sense, he has adapted the scholastic system to the anti-systematic tastes of his day, against which he had lodged an initial apologetic caveat, but which he obviously had also taken to heart.” Richard A. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century,” in Haykin, *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 59, 61.

the late 16th and 17th centuries had to establish Protestant theology for the sake of maintaining [sic] the catholicity of Protestantism mainly in the University context in the course of their independence from the Roman Catholic Church. Now that the Particular Baptists had succeeded in acquiring official recognition as an independent denomination in 1689, Gill's primary goal was to establish a denominational theology on the basis of the established [sic] catholicity of Protestant theology, that is, a Reformed and at the same time Baptist divinity or theology. Indeed, his major concern was with the mid-18th century Particular Baptists under his care, who were isolated from the general academic field. Thus, we cannot expect Gill to follow the scholastic pattern of the late 16th and 17th centuries in a perfect manner. Though he adopted scholastic method in a relatively faithful way, he intentionally tended to avoid the elaborate scholastic divisions and terminology where he could, while not losing sight of the substantial contents of Reformed orthodoxy. He does not use the Medieval *quaestio* and *disputatio* method readily discovered in the late 16th and 17th century scholastic works, even in the works of Bunyan. As will become clear, he does not pay extensive attention to the methodological and philosophical issues as the pre-suppositional or underlying issues of his system. Usually, he either mentions such issues in one or two sentences or avoids them, except when he feels the inevitable need to deal with them. Instead, he directly enters into the theological and biblical issues. What he intends to deliver in his systematic divinity are the propositional truths deduced from Scripture in a systematic manner rather than elaborate scholastic discussions which were useful mainly in the academic field. Thus, considering the mid-18th century Particular Baptist and general intellectual context, it does not come as a surprise to discover that he softened the scholastic method and abstracted or avoided methodological and philosophical discussions in order to defend and educate Reformed and Baptist theology.¹⁷⁷

The immediate pastoral nature of Gill's writing is apparent from the first sentence of his *Body of Divinity*: "Having completed an Exposition of the whole Bible, the Books both of the Old and of the New Testament; I considered with myself what would be best next to engage in for the further instruction of the people under my care; and my thoughts let me to enter upon a Scheme of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity."¹⁷⁸ After John Gill was ordained for ministry in the Horsleydown church on March 22, 1720, he continued as pastor until his death in October 1771. He began his ministry in the context of doctrinal instability, symbolized by the events in London at Salter's Hall over subscription, just one year before Gill was ordained. Of this event, Copston wrote, "Whilst the situation is not straightforward, it is fair to say that the non-subscribers won the day and have been credited by historians of Dissent with ushering in a theological

¹⁷⁷ Park, "Nature and Grace," 77–78.

¹⁷⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, xxxv.

shift towards the acceptance of heterodox views.”¹⁷⁹ Robert Oliver also described the context in which Gill served, writing,

By 1730 there was a widespread perception that historic Christianity was under attack from a developing rationalism. Something of the seriousness of the situation had become apparent at about the time of Gill’s settlement in London. Christianity itself was being threatened by Unitarianism in both its Arian and Socinian forms. This dangerous heresy was threatening all the Protestant denominations. It appeared first in the Church of England, but was to do its greatest damage among the Dissenters. The old Presbyterian and General Baptist denominations were almost destroyed by it.¹⁸⁰

These descriptions of Gill’s context should serve further to highlight the importance of his defense of Trinitarian doctrine in his role as pastor.

The following section will briefly trace some of Gill’s ministry as it pertained to Christ’s eternal Sonship, beginning with his 1731 *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. From there, I will move to discuss some internal issues within Gill’s church that influenced his later writings on the Trinity.

The Doctrine of the Trinity (1731/52)

According to John Rippon (1751–1836), the pastor who succeeded Gill at Carter Lane (formerly Horsleydown), Gill’s *The Doctrine of the Trinity*¹⁸¹ was composed of material he delivered as lectures, and “was occasioned by the progress of Sabellianism among some of the Baptist churches at that time.”¹⁸² An early Memoir of Gill pointed to a specific culprit of this rising Sabellianism:

[O]ne Mr *Davis*, a Physician, and a Baptist member, wrote a treatise called *The great Concern of Jew and Gentile*; with some other little pamphlets, which had a

¹⁷⁹ Copson, “General Baptists in the Eighteenth Century,” 48.

¹⁸⁰ Oliver, “John Gill (1697–1771),” 21.

¹⁸¹ John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc’d into the Form of a Treatise* (Little-Britain: Aaron Ward, 1731). All citations, unless otherwise noted, are from John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc’d into the Form of a Treatise*, 2nd ed. (Southwark, England: George Keith, 1752).

¹⁸² Rippon, *Memoir*, 37.

tendency this way; and which, though very trifling things, having scarce any shew of argument and reasoning in them, yet it seemed expedient they should be taken notice of in the course of these Sermons on the Trinity.¹⁸³

The practical, pastoral concern behind Gill's theological engagement with William Davis, was also included: "the Gentleman [Davis] being a man of good moral character, and of a soft, insinuating behavior: his profession also introduced him into several families, where he might have the opportunity of inculcating and spreading his notions."¹⁸⁴

Gill engaged Davis' *The Great Concern of Jew and Gentile* at over a dozen points in his *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and clearly understood Davis' position as Sabellian.¹⁸⁵ Gill's primary aim for engaging Davis was to refute what he perceived as a rejection of personal distinction within the divine essence.¹⁸⁶ Affirming both unity and plurality (Tri-unity) was non-negotiable, and was foundational to Gill's doctrine of the Trinity. It is no surprise, then, that most of Gill's interaction with Davis is concentrated to his first three chapters in which he sought to establish the unity, plurality, and Triunity of the Godhead.¹⁸⁷

Gill began *The Doctrine of the Trinity* by asserting that "The Doctrine of a Trinity of persons in the unity of the divine essence is, without controversy, a great mystery of godliness."¹⁸⁸ He went on to argue that the doctrine of the Trinity is only

¹⁸³ Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (1773), 1:xx.

¹⁸⁴ Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (1773), 1:xx.

¹⁸⁵ Gill's reference to and interaction with Davis remained unchanged in his second edition. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 13–14, 15–19, 31–32, 38, 39, 40, 41–42, 56–59, 62–65, 65–66, 66, 71, 129–31, 149.

¹⁸⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 15–19, 31–32, 56–59, 62–66.

¹⁸⁷ When Gill published his first edition *The Doctrine of the Trinity* in 1731, William Davis later responded in 1743 with *A Brief Reply to Mr. Gill's Doctrine of the Trinity: Being a Defense of a Small Piece, intituled, the Great Concern of Jew and Gentile*. William Davis, *A Brief Reply to Mr. Gill's Doctrine of the Trinity: Being a Defense of a Small Piece, Intituled, the Great Concern of Jew and Gentile* (London: H. Kent, 1743), 5–6, 6–8, 22–23, 33–35.

¹⁸⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 1.

discernable through revelation, which reveals that God is a unity of essence and plurality of persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, who each have distinct characteristics and personalities. The book is divided up into nine chapters. The first three chapters take on the biblical revelation of unity, plurality, and tri-unity. The fourth chapter is given to explaining the person of the Father, and four chapters are used for the second Person. Here, Gill devotes individual chapters to the Son as Word, his deity, Sonship, and then his personality. That he wrote four chapters on the second person indicates the importance of Christ's eternal Sonship for establishing the doctrine of the Trinity in Gill's theology. The final chapter was written to explicate the "Personality and Deity of the Holy Ghost." The work is both biblical and theological. Much of the material used in this work is adapted into the first book of his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, first published in 1769, as Gill's thinking on these issues remained highly consistent over the course of his ministry.

Gill's later reflection about this work reveals his self-conscious consistency regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically the doctrine of eternal generation, throughout his ministry. Having finished his treatment on the Trinity in *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Gill wrote the following:

My treatise on the Trinity was written near forty years ago, and when I was a young man; And had I now departed from some words and phrases then used by me, it need not, at such a distance of time, be wondered at; but so far from it, that upon a late revisal of it, I see no reason to retract anything I have written, either as to sense or expression; save only, in a passage or two of scripture, before observed, which then did not stand so clear in my mind, as proofs of the eternal generation of the Son of God; but, upon a more mature consideration of them, I am inclined to think otherwise, and have accordingly altered my sense of them; which alteration, as it is no ways inconsistent with the doctrine as before held by me, so it serves but the more strongly to confirm it.¹⁸⁹

The Doctrine of the Trinity reveals that early on in his ministry, Gill was concerned about threats against the Trinity. His second edition was published in 1752, the

¹⁸⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 171. Rippon quoted this passage in *Memoir*, 37–38.

year following Davis' second edition of *The Great Concern for Jew and Gentile*. It is possible that the re-emergence of that work influenced Gill to re-release his *Doctrine of the Trinity* in second edition.

Disfellowship of Isaac Harman

Threats to the doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship were not mere external or theological concerns to Gill. Events in the 1760s illustrate the continued danger of anti-Trinitarianism, even within Gill's own congregation. One instance revolved around a church member, Isaac Harmon. Harmon was entered into the membership of the church during a church meeting May 9, 1757. The minute book reads on this occasion: "At a Church Meeting May 9th. 1757 Isaac Harmon gave a Satisfactory Account of the Work of God upon his Soul & Testimonies being given of his Agreeable Conversation it was agreed to receive him into Communion."¹⁹⁰ The register of names at the beginning of the church book indicates that he was accepted into the church on May 22, 1757.¹⁹¹ But after more than a decade of membership, John Gill reported at a church meeting that Harman had denied Christ's eternal Sonship. The minutes of this meeting read:

At a full Meeting of the Church on Lord's Day

July 24th. 1768

The Pastor reported that he had rec^d. a letter from I^c [Isaac] Harman Member of this Ch^{ch}. In w^{ch}. he Declared he had been long at Enmity wth. the Doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of Christ by the Generation of the Father.

Upon w^{ch}. A Motion being made, seconded & Thirded The Vote was past.

That Isa^c. Harman who now stands a Member of this Church be rejected, removed, excluded from the comm^{on}; of it for his declared enmity wth. the Doctrine of Christs

¹⁹⁰ *Church Meeting Minutes: 1719–1808: Horsleydown and Carter Lane* (Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, n.d.).

¹⁹¹ His name is actually accounted for twice in the register, since the members names were listed again when the church moved to Carter Lane in 1757. The first mention gives the May 22 date, whereas the latter mention only indicates, "May 1757." *Church Meeting Minutes*, 22, 27 in the name register at the beginning of the book.

Eternal Sonship by the Generation of the Father untill [sic] he manifests a repentance Satisfactory to the Church.

Which vote was Carried unanimously & wth. out one desinting [sic] voice, or hand lift up when the Negative was put up—And Accordingly he was rejected, removed & excluded from the communion of the Church in the Name & by the Authority of the Church for the reason, & for so long as Expressed in the vote [a]nd Bro. Collier & Bro. Hoffman were App. Messengers to Acq. him therewith.¹⁹²

This report reveals a number of things about the way the church handled issues of doctrine and discipline. The meeting illustrates the congregational nature of the church. Ejecting Harman from communion was not a matter up to the pastor, but was done together with the whole church, in this case by vote. From this one record it is difficult to discern exactly how the situation led to Harmon's quick rejection, but the register of names after the church had moved to Carter Lane in 1757 clarifies the matter. According to that part of the minute book, Harman was "removed hav^g. rent himself July 24, 1768."¹⁹³ Thus, the church apparently took his letter as an act of separation. His denial of Christ's eternal Sonship appears to be the motivating factor behind his withdrawal, leading the congregation to exclude him from their communion. As far as the church minutes are concerned, no attempt was made to dissuade him or bring him back, as is the case in other issues of discipline. Although, Gill's receiving of the letter personally may indicate that they had prior conversation on the issue. George Ella, who accessed the church minutes to write his biography of Gill, wrote with respect to issues of discipline, that "If members resigned orally, or sent letters of resignation, these resignations were accepted without further ado. If the members did not request their dismissal, a process of counseling ensued which could last months before a final decision was taken. Repentant excommunicants were speedily taken back into fellowship."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² *Church Meeting Minutes*.

¹⁹³ *Church Meeting Minutes*, 27.

¹⁹⁴ The example he gives of the later situation concerned the son of Pastor Gill, who went by the same name. Ella wrote, "One such person [who repented and was brought back into the church] was none other than John Gill's son of the same name who was excluded from membership in 1755 but soon

Harmon's speedy removal, however, may also be explained by a pamphlet he authored the same year, titled, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*.¹⁹⁵ Harmon's pamphlet set out to demonstrate the inconsistencies and "contradictions" among proponents of eternal generation, "that Doctrine, which for so many Years, and with so much *Ignorance* and *Zeal* has been *wrathfully* contended for."¹⁹⁶ In light of the contradictions he presents, Harmon compared "the Creed" to "an *old Wife's Fable*," and intended to deal with it "in the Manner that all old Wives Fables *deserve* to be treated."¹⁹⁷ In laying out the inconsistencies of the "Eternal-Generation Gentlemen," Harmon often cited Gill. While Harmon displayed respect for Gill's learning, it is clear that he was repulsed by Gill's (and other proponents of eternal generation) strong conviction for strict adherence.¹⁹⁸

Harmon wrote a blistering statement claiming that the doctrine of eternal generation "is destitute both of Truth and of common Sense; nor can it be said, to be formed and digested from Scripture in any other Sense than as some of our blundering Divines, and raw Academics may be said to discourse from a Text:—that is, away from it."¹⁹⁹ Harmon thus thought it "unreasonable" for consciences to be bound to a Doctrine that could not be proven. His conviction was that he could still be saved "without holding this ridiculous Article of the Catholic Faith."²⁰⁰ It should be noted that while Harmon

came back expressing his sorrow and was reaccepted into membership." George M. Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Durham, NC: Go, 1995), 107.

¹⁹⁵ Isaac Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists* (London, 1768).

¹⁹⁶ Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*, v–vi. See also Godet's short documentation of this pamphlet. Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 250.

¹⁹⁷ Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*, xii.

¹⁹⁸ Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*, 18, xi, vii–viii.

¹⁹⁹ Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*, 24.

²⁰⁰ Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*, 27–28.

disavowed eternal generation, he still held that God is three in one, though in a manner unknown. He quoted a sermon from Thomas Bradbury to explain:

these are Words which the Scripture hath not given me, and therefore I have nothing to say to them. If the Question is, Whether they are three? I can answer, yes. If I am asked whether they are three Gods? I must say no; but how they are three, and how they are one, I do not pretend to tell.²⁰¹

Not only did Harmon reject eternal generation, but he also took offense at what he perceived as a harsh manner of speaking by those contending for the doctrine. He quoted Gill's *A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ* as an example of rhetorical "roughness" and "incivility." Harmon then rebuked Gill and others,

But let us suppose now, (for it must not be granted) that to deny the Doctrine of eternal Generation is to deny the true and proper Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is calling of Names and making Use of abusive Language the most likely Means, in the Opinion of this Gentleman, to convince Gainsayers and put to silence the Ignorance of foolish Men? Is this to shew in Doctrine Uncorruptness, Gravity, Sincerity, sound Speech, that cannot be condemned, that he that is of a contrary Part may be ashamed, having no evil Thing to say of him? Is this in Meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth? Surely it is not.²⁰²

Harmon considered the doctrine of eternal generation non-biblical and non-rational. He also pointed out the differences of expression among its proponents. These eighteenth-century-typical objections, along with his distaste for the strong rhetoric of those who defended eternal generation such as John Gill, pushed him away from Orthodox expressions of the Trinity.

Halting Some "Creeping Errors"

During the month following the rejection of Isaac Harmon from church communion, Gill proposed an elaboration to a few articles in their church confession. Ella described the situation writing, "A special church meeting was called on 7 August 1768 to discuss methods of dealing with the denial of Christ's eternal Sonship which was

²⁰¹ Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*, 28–29.

²⁰² Harmon, *The Creed of the Eternal Generationists*, vii–viii.

troubling members.”²⁰³ It is clear that this was one of the issues, but Gill also added additional explanation to articles pertaining to the imputation of Adam’s sin, the nature of Christ’s incarnation, and Christian liberty with respect to the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. As far as the Trinity was concerned, Gill’s changes to the second and fifth article are of importance. The description of the meeting in the church book is as follows:

At a full Church Meeting Lord’s Day Aug 07th. 1768

The Pastor reported that Whereas it had been Consisently Affirmed that some errors that were Creeping in Among Us were not Contrary to the Articles of the Church; he had therefore Carefully revised them & found that their was no need to alter any Clauses or any Word in them; But thought it proper wth. the Approbation of the Church to add, two or three Clauses here & there in order the more to Strengthen & Explain the sense of them; and proposed to Read them to the Church w^{ch}. he Accordingly did & w^{ch}. were agreed unto by them & were as follows.²⁰⁴

Gill’s additions to these four articles were included immediately after the above entry in the church book. In the second article, Gill added a statement that clarified how each Person is distinct from the others in the Godhead. In it he outlined their personal, intra-Trinitarian distinctions, which he wrote consisted in “peculiar relative properties.” The Father’s peculiar relative property is “begetting,” the Son’s is that “he is begotten,” and the Spirit’s “is to be breathed by the father & the Son & so proceed from both.” Gill took particular care in addressing the distinction of the Son:

The Distinguishing Character & relative property of the Second person is that he is begotten & he is called the only begotten of the Father & his own proper Son, Not as Son by Creation as Angels & Men are; nor by Adoption as Saints are, nor by Office as Civil Magistrates are but by Nature by the fathers Eternal Generation of him in the Divine Nature & therefore he is truly Called the Son.

Gill finished the statement writing that all three are to be worshipped as “the one true God.” The fifth article added clarification concerning how Christ’s human nature was to be understood. In it, Gill confirmed that Christ’s human nature is both body and

²⁰³ Ella, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 107.

²⁰⁴ *Church Meeting Minutes*.

soul, which was created at the time he was “conceived in the Womb of the Virgin.” Significantly, Gill affirmed that Christ’s human nature was “assumed into Union with his Divine person when made of a Woman & not before.” This affirmation not only clarifies Christ’s human nature, but it affirmed that this human nature was united to the second Person—the eternal Son of God.²⁰⁵

A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ (1768)

The same year in which these changes were drawn up, Gill published *A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ*. According to Ella, this work was drawn up “after the 1768 church meeting on the topic,” which this dissertation understands as the August 7 meeting.²⁰⁶ According to Rippon, “Towards the close of his life, as it appears, when the Doctor had narrowly watched the Trinitarian controversy, and long stood in its defense, he seems to have put his finishing hand to a piece which must have cost him immense pains.”²⁰⁷ The work takes particular aim at “Socinians, and others akin to them,” who deny “[t]he eternal Sonship of Christ, or that he is the Son of God by eternal generation, or that he was the Son of God before he was the son of *Mary*, even from all eternity.”²⁰⁸ Gill’s object in this work was not to give an exegetical or theological presentation of Christ’s eternal Sonship. Rather, his aim was historical. Gill’s task was, in his words, “to shew who first set themselves against it, and who have continued the opposition to it, more or less, to this time; and, on the other hand, to shew that sound and orthodox christians, from the earliest times of christianity to the present, have asserted and defended it.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ *Church Meeting Minutes*.

²⁰⁶ Ella, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 108.

²⁰⁷ Rippon, *Memoir*, 87.

²⁰⁸ Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (1773), 2:534.

²⁰⁹ Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (1773), 2:534.

In this careful work of historical theology, Gill mapped an overview of the enemies and defenders of the doctrine through the centuries, carefully examining primary source material. After working through church history into his contemporary era, Gill summed up his argument stating,

that upon the whole it is clear, that the church God has been in the possession of this doctrine of the eternal generation and Sonship of Christ, from the beginning of christianity to the present age, almost eighteen hundred years; nor has there been any one man who professed to hold the doctrine of the Trinity, or of the three distinct divine persons in the unity of the divine essence, that ever opposed it, till the latter end of the seventeenth century.²¹⁰

These exceptions Gill mentioned, who affirmed the Trinity yet abandoned eternal generation, were Hermann Röell (1653-1718) and Thomas Ridgley (1667–1734).²¹¹ Gill also charged Isaac Watts (1674–1748) with Sabellianism, citing his 1725 *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*:

There is indeed a third person of great fame among us, Dr. Isaac Watts, who has expressed his dissatisfaction with the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God, but then he is not to be reckoned a Trinitarian, being so manifestly in the Sabellian scheme, as appears by his *Dissertations* published in 1725.²¹²

This was not the first time Gill mentioned Watts' trouble with the Trinity. In a letter dated to 1744/45, Gill expressed dissatisfaction with Watts, stating that he “has changed

²¹⁰ Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (1773), 2:561–62.

²¹¹ Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (1773), 2:562–63. Gill mentioned both Röell and Ridgley again when he discussed eternal generation in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. In both cases Gill found it odd—Gill called it “a strange paradox!”—that Ridgely could otherwise affirm three persons in the divine essence while basing Christ's Sonship on his mediatorial office and not his generation. For Gill, this idea could not support the Son's deity and personal distinction. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 144. Ridgley hesitated to explain eternal generation, stating that “[t]hese things may be observed in the writings of those who treat of this subject; but, it is to be feared, they enter too far into the explication of this unsearchable mystery, and some will be ready to conclude that they attempt to be wise above what is written.” As Gill argued, Ridgley did make Christ's mediatorial office the basis of Sonship, “we cannot conceive of any character which answers to all these Ideas of sonship, unless that of a Mediator.” See Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion Are Explained and Defended. Being the Substance of Several Lectures on The Assembly's Larger Catechism* (London, 1731), 1:122, 127.

²¹² Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (1773), 2:563.

his mind so often in the doctrine of the trinity as well as in other things, to the great detriment of the doctrine of the gospel, that it is hard to say what his sense is.”²¹³

Gill vigorously concluded his *Dissertation* stating that “all the sound and orthodox writers have unanimously declared for the eternal generation and Sonship of Christ in all ages, and that those only of an unsound mind and judgment, and corrupt in other things as well as this, and many of them men of impure lives and vile principles, have declared against it.”²¹⁴

Gill’s ambition in bringing his historical argument to bear on the Trinitarian controversies of his time stress the centrality of eternal generation in these debates. It also underscores the constant challenges to Christ’s eternal Sonship long into the eighteenth century. That Gill underwent the rigors of documenting the history of eternal generation was neither surprising nor unique. An intensity of research and force of conviction are evident throughout Gill’s writings. Moreover, historical argumentation had long been part of the Trinitarian controversies in England as all sides attempted to claim historical warrant.²¹⁵ But the timing and specific concern for the doctrine of eternal generation

²¹³ Many thanks to Dr. Haykin for passing this letter transcription on to me, which is the work of Gerald Priest. John Gill, “A Letter from John Gill Dated March 7th 1744–45, Transcribed by Gerald Priest,” March 7, 1744. Gill was not the only Trinitarian to criticize Watts, who was aligned with the Non-Subscribers at Salters’ Hall. Gill was surely justified in his criticism of Watts at certain points, and is correct when he pointed critically to Watts’ inconsistencies and certain expressions. With that said, Scott Aniol has argued that Watts, despite his inconsistencies and irregularities, held to the Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. He observed that Watts’ desire to articulate the Trinity apart from the standard terminology created difficulties for him. In the end, Aniol argued that Watts affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity in his later years and would influence many towards Trinitarianism, not through his writings, but through his hymns. Scott Aniol, “Was Isaac Watts Unitarian?: Athanasian Trinitarianism and the Boundary of Christian Fellowship,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 22 (2017): 91–103. I am indebted to Richard Muller for his helpful comments on Watts and for sending me this article.

²¹⁴ John Gill, *Sermons and Tracts*, 1814 ed. (repr., Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, 1999), 6:221.

²¹⁵ For instance, Lim discussed the importance of history in the debates over the Trinity at various points, giving his fifth chapter to these issues: “This chapter contends that a key component of the antitrinitarian cultural and religious habitus was historical, as well as exegetical-theological. In other words, not only were the Socinians adroit at interpreting certain contested texts in an antitrinitarian directions but also they were keenly aware that no biblical exegesis could stand on its own unless one could demonstrate that one’s exegesis put him in the middle of the historical stream of ‘faithful exegetes’” (p. 221). Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 10–11, 53–60, 216, 217–70. Further evidence supporting the importance of church history in these debates can be found in Pfizenmaier, who dedicated an entire chapter to Samuel Clarke’s use of patristics sources. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke*, 89–141.

prove that not only was the Trinity still an issue, but eternal generation was chief among them.

Retrieving Brother Blunt

The conversation within the church and the addition of phrases to the confession by Gill appears to have taken effect among the congregation. In March 1769, just months after the meeting in which it was agreed to add Gill's elaboration to the church confession, messengers were sent to Matthew Blunt, who had been a member of the church since October 1, 1759. According to the church book, Blunt had not shown up for the ordinances. In response to this, the church chose a few messengers at the March 27 meeting to look into the matter and "admonish" him to come. At the next meeting, April 24, it was "Agreed the Messengers to Bro: Blunt be continued they not havin[g] deliver'd their Message." At the church meeting in June, it was reported that the messengers had in fact met with Mr. Blunt, who had "an Uneasiness on his Mind" with the church's previous "proceedings," but would nevertheless try to attend and meet with Gill concerning his qualms. Another report in July showed that neither the messengers nor Gill had been able to follow up with Blunt, and the church agreed to continue sending messengers to him. The next mention of Blunt in the October minutes took a turn for the worse, as his absence was explained in the form of a confession. The church book reads,

The Messengers to Bro. Blunt reported that they had been w.th him and that he declared his Disbelief of the Eternal Sonship of X^t and that he had no other Conception of his being the son of God otherwise than. . . human nature—Also our pastor acq^d the Church that the said Blunt had been w.th him & Declared the same to him & that he had endeavoured be every Means he was capable off to set him right be all he feared to very little purpose as he seemed quite obstinate; Only as he went away he promised to Consider what he had said to him.

Agreed that the same Messengers be Continued & that they once more wait on him to know whether he is of the same sentiments as when the Messengers was w.th him & when he Waited on the Pastor of this Ch^{ch}.—²¹⁶

²¹⁶ *Church Meeting Minutes.*

It may be surmised that Blunt's uneasiness developed as the church added Gill's clarification with respect to the Son's eternal generation. At this point, Blunt had been visited at least twice, and attempts had been made even more. We also see Gill's personal involvement in the case. Gill himself is said to have made contact with him, and the minutes describe him endeavoring with great energy to bring brother Blunt back into Christian confession. Gill, it seems, was not convinced his efforts made any difference. Nevertheless, the church again agreed to send messengers to him in order to bring him back into the fold. Patience characterized their practice in this case of church discipline.

During the next month, the church messengers found that Blunt still held his convictions. Thus, the church agreed to send messengers "once more." However, they also agreed that if he were to continue in his convictions that they "must Remove him from their Communion." Regrettably, expulsion was necessary. On January 22, 1770, it was reported that after "several meetings. . . he still remained in the same Sentiments & Declared that he could not in conscience joyn in Communion" with the church. He was accordingly removed from the roster, and messengers were appointed to give him news of it.²¹⁷

This episode highlights the great care that was taken to ensure the purity of the church under the oversight of Gill and the diligence and patience with which it was carried out. The church allowed repeated opportunities for reflection and repentance, and Gill himself paid visit to Blunt in order to convince him of his errors. In the end, Blunt persisted, but not without opportunity for repentance. This episode also highlights the real and present danger of doctrinal infidelity at that time.

Prior to publishing his *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Gill wrote theological and historical works on the doctrine of the Trinity, which demonstrates the importance of this discussion for the church in the eighteenth century. He was not only

²¹⁷ *Church Meeting Minutes*.

faithful to defend these central truths in his public writing ministry, but he was also faithful to the members of his church, ministering to them in private. It should be remembered that Gill's writings did not occur in a theological vacuum. His *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*—the definitive summary of Gill's theology in which he vigorously defended eternal generation—was first preached to his congregation over a five-year period.²¹⁸ His concerns were not academic in nature, although his writings are rich in substance and rigorous in argumentation. For him, the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation, concerned the very life of a Christian. As a pastor, this is clear in his modification of the church confession in 1768, in his ongoing publication of writings on the Trinity, and in his personal ministry to members of his church. The significance of this doctrine is perhaps best expressed in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* where he wrote,

The doctrine of the Trinity is often represented as a speculative point, of no great moment whether it is believed or no, too mysterious and curious to be pryed into, and that it had better be let alone than meddled with; but alas! it enters into the whole of our salvation, and all the parts of it; into all the doctrines of the gospel, and into the experience of the saints; there is no doing without it.²¹⁹

Furthermore, both Gill's writings and the internal church dealings reveal that the crucial point of difficulty, with respect to the Trinity, was the doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship. It was the emphasis of Gill's 1731/52 *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, a major part of the update made to the Carter-Lane statement of faith, and would be expressed as the central component to his doctrine of the Trinity in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, composed in the last years of his earthly life.

²¹⁸ Rippon, *Memoir*, 96.

²¹⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 138.

CHAPTER 3

“NOTHING ELSE THAN GENERATION”: JOHN GILL’S DOCTRINE OF CHRIST’S ETERNAL SONSHIP

John Gill considered the doctrine of the Son’s eternal generation as central to the doctrine of the Trinity and a doctrine without which the Trinity could not be supported. Fundamentally, Gill conceived of the doctrine of eternal generation as a generation of person, not essence, which both distinguished the divine Persons but supported their consubstantiality and equality. Thus, the doctrine of eternal generation was an indispensable doctrine that upheld the doctrine of the Trinity by affirming both the Son’s full deity and equality, yet by also maintaining the Son’s distinct personhood within the one divine essence. Gill came to his doctrine of eternal generation by appealing to Scripture as his magisterial norm while looking to the witness of the early church, medieval Christianity, and the theology of the Reformation and post-Reformation as his ministerial guides in understanding the doctrine of the Trinity and eternal generation as revealed in Scripture. Gill articulated and defended his doctrine of Christ’s eternal Sonship, while also confronting anti-Trinitarianism in its various forms. Given that Gill’s articulation and defense of the Trinity and the eternal Sonship of Christ relied on the patterns of exegesis and metaphysical framework by which the church had come to speak and understand the Trinity, his defense was one of entrenchment. Gill did not yield to the Enlightenment rationalism and radical biblicism that pervaded much of the eighteenth century intellectual discourse. Instead, he grounded his doctrine of eternal generation on the categories and conceptual framework that had been handed down to him by the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy. Far from avoiding confrontation with the best of opposing viewpoints, Gill tackled them head-on, refused to concede his ground,

and firmly contended for the Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity by employing a traditional hermeneutical and metaphysical framework that characterized pre-Enlightenment Christianity.¹

Divine Triunity

John Gill was forthright that his doctrine of the Trinity relied primarily upon Scriptural revelation. In the opening paragraph of *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill had stated: “The doctrine of a Trinity of persons in the unity of the divine essence is, without controversy, a great mystery of godliness.”² It is no surprise, then, that Gill considered it “a doctrine of pure revelation,” which meant that it is inaccessible to reason alone: “That there is God, and that there is but one God, who is a Being possess of all divine perfections, may be known by the light of nature: But that there is a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, who are distinct, tho’ not divided from each other, is what natural reason could never have discovered.”³ Since it is a doctrine revealed in Scripture it must be

¹ Muller briefly introduces the hermeneutical changes and philosophical challenges that arose in articulating the doctrine of the Trinity during the Reformation and Post-reformation period here: Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:59–62. Muller has elsewhere argued that Gill’s “close attention to the works of the continental orthodox writers rather than to their less-than-orthodox successors places him directly in the line of seventeenth-century scholastic orthodoxy and consistently out of sympathy with the rational and philosophical changes of the early eighteenth century as they impinged on theology.” Richard A. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 55, cf. 67–68. Muller, however, appears to align Gill with “the so-called transitional or latitudinarian theologies” here: Muller, *PRRD*, 120. See Park’s statements again concerning Gill’s “traditional understanding of the Trinity.” Hong-Gyu Park, “Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)” (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2001), 233.

² John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc’d into the Form of a Treatise*, 2nd ed. (Southwark, England: George Keith, 1752), 1.

³ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 2. Muller accurately represents Gill’s method: “Among the British writers of the late orthodox era, the Particular Baptist John Gill stands out as a defender of the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘a doctrine of pure revelation’ to the setting aside of all but biblical argumentation and patristic usage.” This is fundamentally correct: Gill conceived of the Trinity as knowable through revelation alone. His Trinitarian beliefs are drawn principally from Scripture, although as this dissertation has argued, he believed his beliefs had precedent throughout the history of the church. Muller proceeded to further elaborate Gill’s approach to the theology, “What is characteristic of both works [Gill’s *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* and *The Doctrine of the Trinity*], although more evident in the treatise, are Gill’s distance from any particular philosophical models of the era, his reliance on traditionary exegetical-topic exposition, and, within that exposition, his impressive use of Judaica, particularly rabbinic exegesis, as a

believed “though it may be attended with some difficulties, which we cannot account for.”⁴ Gill believed that the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity can be seen in Satan’s attacks to either undermine belief in the deity of one of the divine persons or to elevate mankind’s faculties in the attempt to understand these and other Christian doctrines.⁵

Divine Unity

Gill’s argument in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* moved from unity, to plurality, to the Trinity of persons, and finally to the distinct persons. Similarly, in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, he moved from unity to plurality before he inserted a chapter on the intra-personal Trinitarian relations. Only then did he explain “the personality and deity” of each of the three divine persons. Gill’s chapter on the intra-Trinitarian relations in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* included additional argumentation to what he wrote in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* on the subject of the Son’s eternal generation. Thus, Gill began both of his major works on the Trinity by first giving an account of God’s unity.

Consistent with the patterns of the Reformed Scholastics, Gill’s doctrine of God began with arguments for God’s existence and a chapter on Scripture prior to teaching on the divine nature, names, then attributes of God.⁶ Only after treating these did

support of his interpretation of the Old Testament, including its trinitarian implications. In addition, Gill evidences a significant awareness and use of the theological works of Reformed and, occasionally, Lutheran orthodox predecessors in the seventeenth century.” Muller, *PRRD*, 4:140.

⁴ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 2–3.

⁵ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 3–4.

⁶ While there were variations of arrangement among the Reformed orthodox, Gill’s general outline is consistent with their arrangement. Muller identifies Gill’s arrangement moving from God’s existence to the epistemological basis of Scripture with Beza and Bucanus (pp. 161–62). See Muller’s full discussion of topical arrangement of doctrines among the Reformed orthodox here: Muller, *PRRD*, 3:157–64. Additionally, the Ramist division between doctrine and practice is manifested in Gill’s *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, which moves from theology to Christian living (Practical Theology). Hence, “Doctrine and practice should go together; and in order both to know and do the will of God, instruction in doctrine and practice is necessary; the one being first taught will lead on to the other.” John Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, 1839 ed. (repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), xxxv. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:159–61.

Gill expound the doctrine of the Trinity.⁷ Having outlined the attributes of God, Gill then moved “to prove that this God, who is possessed of all these great and glorious perfections, is but *one*.”⁸ For Gill, the unity of God was an essential doctrine: “This is a first principle, and not to be doubted of; it is a most certain truth, most surely to be believed, and with the greatest confidence to be asserted This is the first and chief commandment which God has given, and requires assent and obedience to; on which all religion, doctrine, and faith depend.”⁹ Whereas Gill considered the doctrine of the Trinity a doctrine of “pure revelation,” he believed the unity of God was revealed in both Scripture and nature.¹⁰

Gill used a variety of words to denote the unity of God’s one divine nature, such terms as “nature,” “essence,” “being,” “substance” “form” and “Godhead” that were all employed interchangeably.¹¹ Gill recognized that numerous texts make reference to God’s nature, which he said denoted “Divinity, Deity, or Godhead” (Gal 4:8; 2 Pet 1:4; Acts 27:29; Rom 1:20; Col 2:9). He connected God’s nature to Christ’s existence in the “form of God” (Phil 2:6). According to Gill, this form “designs not any external form, for God has no visible shape, but his internal Glory, excellency, nature, and perfections, in which ‘Christ is equal with him, and his fellow.’” Gill equated nature (and thus form) with essence as well: “Essence, which is the same thing with nature, is ascribed to God.” Gill defined essence as “that by which a person or thing is what it is, that is its nature.”

⁷ Park has also pointed out that Gill’s arrangement was similar to “the fully developed Protestant systems.” Park, “Grace and Nature,” 237.

⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 125, emphasis original.

⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 125–26.

¹⁰ “[I]t is the voice of both reason and revelation; it is discernible by the light of nature; what teaches men there is a God, teaches them there is but one.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 126.

¹¹ The following discussion of these words in Gill’s writings benefits greatly from Steven Tshombe Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 193–98.

Gill derived his justification for speaking of God in terms of essence or being from Isaiah 28:29, which affirms that God “has the most excellent essence or being.”¹² It also arose from God’s name, “I am that I am,” which Gill interpreted as “The eternal Being, the Being of beings.”¹³ Gill believed God’s name Jehovah denoted the same thing, but also added that this term revealed that God is “a necessary and self-existent being.” Gill further connected the name Jehovah to the divine essence and elaborated thus upon its meaning:

[I]t comes from the root היה or הוה which signify, *to be*, and is expressive of the essence of God; of his necessary and self-existence, for God naturally and necessarily exists; which cannot be said of any other: creatures owe their being to the arbitrary will of God; and so might be, and might not be, as he pleased; but God exists in and of himself, he is a self-existent and independent Being, as he must needs be, since he is before all creatures and therefore cannot have his being from them; and he is the cause of theirs, and therefore must be independent of them; and yet, when we say he is self-existent, it must not be understand as if he made himself; for though he exists, he is not made. He is the Being of beings; all creatures have their beings from him and in him, ‘the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that is in them;’ he is the former and maker of all things; he is eminently *the Being*, and all in comparison of him are mere non-entities.¹⁴

Fully understanding God’s essence, Gill believed, was beyond the limitations and capacity of finite humanity. Gill used the terms nature and being as equivalents when making this claim, “yet it is impossible for a finite mind, in its most exalted state, to comprehend the infinite Nature and Being of God.”¹⁵

¹² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30.

¹³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 25–26.

¹⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 28–29, emphasis original. While the word “Jehovah” was first used in Latin in 1516, it was introduced into English translation by William Tyndale. It first appeared in his translation of the Pentateuch that was smuggled into England and began emerging in 1530. According to Daniell, “In Hebrew, the four-consonant sacred name was not to be spoken, so when the vowel-points were added it was given those of *Adonai* (Lord), indicating that the latter was to be substituted. Renaissance scholars of Hebrew thought that those vowels were to be understood as belonging to the sacred tetragrammaton itself, producing *Jehovah*.” Tyndale explained “Jehovah” with the following note: “Jehovah is God’s name, neither is any creature so called. And is as much to say as one that is of himself, and dependeth of nothing. Moreover as oft as thou seest LORD in great letters (except there be any error in the printing) it is in Hebrew, *Jehovah*, thou that art or he that is” (p. 284). Of course, as Daniell also noted, the tetragrammaton is now rendered *Yahweh* by modern scholars. Quotation from Tyndale’s *Pentateuch* in David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 283–84.

¹⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30.

Similarly, the terms substance and Godhead pointed to the one essence or nature of God. In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill wrote with reference to Hebrews 1:3 that the Father and Son are the same “in nature and substance.” He further stated of this verse that “Christ is the image of the Father’s Person, as he is possessed of the whole divine nature or substance.”¹⁶ Gill’s use of Godhead for the divine essence is prominent, since, as Godet observes, Gill “entitled chapter twenty seven in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* ‘Of a Plurality in the Godhead; Or a Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Divine Essence’ which indicates that term Godhead was interchangeable with essence.”¹⁷ In one place, Gill glosses θεότης (“divine nature” in many English translations) as Godhead.¹⁸

Gill believed that God’s nature is spiritual and simple. God’s simplicity, however, does not preclude a Trinity. Viewing the terms nature, essence, and Godhead as essentially synonymous in this regard, Gill argued,

[n]or is the simplicity of God to be disproved by the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead; for though there are three distinct persons, there is but one nature and essence common to them all, and which is not parted and divided among them, but is jointly and equally possessed by them; nor do these persons really differ from the divine nature and essence, nor from one another, but by their distinct modes of subsisting; so that they only distinguish and modify, but do neither divide nor compose the divine nature.¹⁹

Gill sought to prove the unity of God by appealing to God’s perfections and by examining specific biblical texts. God’s self-existence, his nature as the first being and cause, independence, eternity, infinity and incomprehensibility, omnipotence, goodness, and self-sufficiency were all arguments for God’s unity in addition to the way

¹⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 81. See Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 195.

¹⁷ Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 198. Gill says that the divine nature is also “what is called Divinity, Deity, or Godhead.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30.

¹⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 5. It is noteworthy that Gill’s use of “Godhead” was not peculiar to him among English-speaking theologians. See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:173.

¹⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 34.

God relates to “his creatures.”²⁰ Gill carefully defined God’s unity by contrasting his Trinitarian views with those of Arianism, Sabellianism, and Tritheism. Gill rejected the Arian understanding of “one supreme God, and two subordinate or inferior ones” along with the Sabellian view “that God is but one person,” which he viewed as a contemporary Socinian and Unitarian threat in his day. He likewise rejected the Tritheistic view of unity which purported that God is three numerically distinct essences who are yet identified as one because they are “of the same nature.”²¹

Contrary to these views of God’s unity, Gill contended that God’s unity must be understood in a Trinitarian sense. In this sense, “[T]here is but one divine essence, undivided, and common to Father, Son, and Spirit, and in this sense but one God; since there is but one essence, though there are different modes of subsisting in it which are called persons; and these possess the whole essence undivided.”²² Each person possesses the one divine essence in full since God is a simple, uncompounded being. Thus their unity is not “a unity of parts,” in which they each make up a part of the whole, a view that has come to be called “partialism.”²³ Rather, Gill asserted that “God is one in number and

²⁰ Although presented in a different order, the list of perfections is the same in both works. One exception in these parallel sections is the omission of “judge” from the list of ways God relates to his creation. *The Doctrine of the Trinity* includes God’s relation as Creator, King, Judge, and Lawgiver. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 126–27. Compare with Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 5–9.

²¹ Gill added a few sentences of historical exposition in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* when discussing Sabellianism and then described how it had tempted some professing Christians: “Our Socinians and modern Unitarians are much of the same sentiment with the Sabellians in this respect: and some who profess evangelical doctrines have embraced it, or are nibbling at it; fancying they have got new light, when they have only imbibed an old stale error, an ancient work of darkness, which has been confuted over and over.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 127–28. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 11–13.

²² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 128. The statement in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* is nearly identical. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 13.

²³ Craig and Moreland appear to articulate a partialist version of the Trinity: “So if the persons of the Trinity are not divine in virtue of being instances of the divine nature, in virtue of what are they divine? Consider an analogy. One way of being feline is to instantiate the nature of a cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat’s DNA or skeleton is feline, even if neither is a cat. Nor is this a sort of downgraded or attenuated felinity: A cat’s skeleton is fully and unambiguously feline. Indeed, a cat just is a feline animal, as a cat’s skeleton is a feline skeleton. Now if a cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature, in virtue of what is a cat’s DNA or skeleton feline? One plausible answer is that they are parts of a cat. This suggests that we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God. Now obviously, the persons are not parts of God in the sense in which a skeleton is part of a cat; but given that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead, it seems

nature.” This unity, Gill explained, was not threatened by the plurality of God’s names, attributes, or the persons of the Trinity. Gill maintained that a plurality of persons was not inconsistent with divine unity since they “differ not from the divine essence, nor from one another, but by their distinctive modes of subsisting.”²⁴

By examining a number of Old Testament and New Testament passages, Gill established a hermeneutical rule to understand God’s unity: texts that speak of God’s unity cannot be attributed to one divine person alone, but must be understood as inclusive of all three persons. By way of example, Gill argued that Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord!” should not exclude the Son who is also called “Jehovah” (Lord) elsewhere (Exod 27:7; Num 21:6; cf. 1 Cor 10:9; Jer 23:6; Zech 12:10); nor should the Holy Spirit be excluded, who is also called “Jehovah” (Lord) (Isa 6:1, 5, 8, 9; cf. Acts 28:25, 26). Gill reasons, then, that both Son and Spirit should be included with the Father in the Hebrew word *Eloheanu*, which could be translated as “our Gods,” but was better translated, “our *divine persons*”—a reference, he believed, to all three of the divine persons. Therefore, according to Gill, Deuteronomy 6:4 reveals God’s unity in a way that also affirms that all three divine persons “are one Lord.”²⁵

Understanding God’s unity in a Trinitarian sense, Gill affirmed the Nicene understanding of Christ as *homoousios* with the Father. It was one of the extra-biblical terms Gill defended in the Introduction of the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, which he deemed as synonymous with the Latin derivative “consubstantial.”²⁶ Gill was well aware

undeniable that there is some sort of **part-whole relation** obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.” J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 591, emphasis original.

²⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 129. The idea of “distinct modes of subsisting” is vital to Gill’s understanding of the Trinity and is discussed further below.

²⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 128–29, Gill’s translations, emphasis original. Gill provided an extended discussion of Deuteronomy 4:6 in order to respond to William Davis’ modalistic interpretation. See Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 15–19.

²⁶ Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 198–201.

of the term's historical consequence in the development of Trinitarian and Christological doctrine, evidenced in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* and his *Dissertation on the Eternal Sonship Concerning Christ*. He believed the terms convey "the Son's being of the same substance, nature and essence with the Father."²⁷ It was probably due to his ecclesial context in an English-speaking congregation that Gill more frequently used the phrases "same nature" and "same essence" to explain how each Person shares fully in the divine essence. That is, rather than using "consubstantial," a more technical term and Latin derivative, Gill opted for more explanatory phrases such as "same nature" and "same essence" to explain the reality that God the Son has the same divine nature as God the Father.²⁸

The doctrine of God's unity, Gill believed, also bore doxological importance since it "fixes and settles the object of worship, so being closely attended to, it guides the mind right in the consideration of it, while worshipping, without any confusion and division in it." For Gill, although worship is given to the one God, it does not overlook the three Persons, for each is owed equal worship. When any one of the persons is given worship, it is never to the exclusion of the others since they are one. In Gill's thinking, the unity of God provided a fixed object of Christian "faith, hope, and love, without division and distraction of mind," which is directed to "the one only true God, Father, Son, and Spirit." Not only this, Gill was convinced that this unity of the divine persons supported Christian unity (Eph 4: 3–6).²⁹

While Gill affirmed the unity of God's nature, he did so in a way that was distinctly Trinitarian. His understanding of God's unity of essence did not diminish the plurality of Persons who subsist within the divine essence. The one, simple nature of God

²⁷ John Gill, *Sermons and Tracts*, 1814 ed. (repr., Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, 1999), 6:211. Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 199.

²⁸ Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 199.

²⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 130.

is shared among three Persons who subsist in their peculiar modes and are together the object of Christian faith, love, and worship.

Divine Plurality

As noted above, Gill did not set forth an explication of God's unity of essence without reference to the Trinity of persons. This is due to the fact that speech about God must always recognize that there is "a Trinity of Persons in the unity of the divine essence."³⁰ In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill divided his discussion of God's plurality into two chapters, the first intended to prove that there is a plurality, and, the second, to show that God's plurality is specifically a plurality of three persons. His *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* follows the same pattern, although he combined both chapters together directly after his discussion of divine unity.³¹

Plurality in unity. Gill's line of argumentation began with an examination of the divine names in the Bible, where he relied heavily upon the Old Testament Hebrew names *Elohim* and *Adonim*. Gill argued that *Elohim*, a plural noun, was used to reveal a plurality of persons in the one divine essence. Considering Genesis 1:1, Gill thought Moses' use of the plural *Elohim* was significant considering the fact that he could have used other singular names for God. In light of the surrounding pagan polytheism, one would expect Moses to use one of these names to protect the monotheistic worship of God. Instead, Gill argued that Moses' use of the plural name in his pagan context was not "a plurality of mere names and characters, to which creative powers cannot be ascribed; but a plurality of persons, for so the words may be rendered, distributively, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language." This quote reveals how careful Gill was to refute Sabellian interpretations in which the persons were understood as mere names or

³⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 130. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 45.

³¹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 22–73. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 130–40.

assumed roles. Gill's own paraphrase of Genesis 1:1 brought out his Trinitarian understanding of this Hebrew idiom: "In the beginning every one, or each of the divine persons, created the heaven and the earth." Gill's understanding of *Elohim* in Genesis 1 was consistent with his interpretation of Genesis 1:2, 3: Gill understood the reference to the Spirit over the waters as the Holy Spirit and God's speaking creation into existence as a reference to God the Son—the eternal Word of God.³² Gill further observed that *Elohim* in Genesis 1:1 is the subject of a singular verb, which may point to "a plurality of persons, in the unity of the divine essence," although in other instances it is paired with plural verbs, adjectives, and participles, which point to a plurality of persons.³³ Gill alerted his readers to the fact that his focus on this name was not due to the fact that it presented the weightiest argument for divine plurality, but because it was so frequently used in Scripture with reference to God and occurs in peculiar grammatical constructions. That this name was used for angels, magistrates, and Moses presented no issue for Gill since they "are the vice-regents and representatives of the Elohim, the divine persons, the Trine-une God." It also made sense that *Elohim* in some places referred to one of the divine persons since the divine essence is "common to them all; and since each of them possess the whole divine nature and essence undivided." Gill's understanding of *Adonim* proved the same point: the plural noun is a reference to a plurality within the one divine essence, which in some contexts (i.e., Dan 4:13, 17, 24) is identified with other singular nouns that reveal a plurality within unity.³⁴

³² Gill pointed his readers to John 1:1, 2, 3 as support for this interpretation. Gill's identification of the Son as the Word of God who speaks creation into existence is developed further in chapter 5 below.

³³ Gill here cited page 124 of Pierre Allix's (1641-1717) work in which he argued that Trinitarian doctrine was taught and understood by ancient Jews. [Pierre Allix], *The Judgement of the Ancient Jewish Church, Against the Unitarians, in the Controversy upon the Holy Trinity, and the Divinity of Our Blessed Saviour* (London, 1699), xvii. Like Allix, Gill believed that "The ancient Jews not only concluded a plurality, but even a Trinity from the word Elohim." Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 131–32.

³⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 131–32. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 22–27.

The plural names of God are joined with God's manner of speaking about himself with respect to creation, providence, and salvation to further reveal God's plurality. Creation, revealed in Genesis 1, was clearly an act of multiple persons who are one God. When God said "Let us make man," (Gen 1:26, Gill's translation) it is plural, but the "image" and "likeness" (Gill's translations) into which man was made is singular, thus pointing to a plurality within unity. Gill rejected the notion that the plural "Let us" denoted the angelic council or the "royal we" (*regio more*, as Gill referred to it). Instead, Gill contended that it referenced "the one God, and a plurality of persons in the Deity."³⁵ Continuing to rely heavily on his exegesis of Old Testament texts, Gill pointed to providential acts of God in which he spoke of himself in the plural (e.g., Gen 11:7; Isa 6:8, 41:21, 22, 23). Gill also noted that life with God is spoken in Scripture as communion with multiple persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thus demonstrating a plurality within God (John 14:23; 1 John 1:3; 2 Cor 13:14).³⁶

Gill's final argument for plurality derived from his conviction about the Angel of the Lord. Put simply, "A plurality in the Deity may be proved from those passages of scripture which speak of the angel of Jehovah, who also is Jehovah; now if there is a Jehovah that is sent, and therefore called an angel, and a Jehovah that sends, there must be more persons than one who are Jehovah."³⁷ Looking at a variety of texts, Gill argued that the Angel of the Lord was actually Jehovah. Gill pointed out that not only does Scripture ascribe divine names to him, but he performs acts that can only be accomplished by God. More than this, Scripture clearly speaks of more than one called Jehovah.³⁸ Contrary to William Davis, author of *The Great Concern*, Gill cited Matthew

³⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 132–33, Gill's translations.

³⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 132–34. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 27–36.

³⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 134.

³⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 134–35. Cf. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 36–44.

4:10 against the idea that the Angel of the Lord could “personate” God and receive worship on his behalf. For the Angel to receive worship, he must be God. In fact, Gill further specified the identity of the Angel of the Lord as God the Son, the eternal *Logos*:

It is a rule, which, I believe, will hold good, that whenever any voice was heard under the Old Testament dispensation, which is ascribed to *Jehovah*, it is always to be understood, not of the Father, but of the Word; and whenever any visible shape and form of the human nature, which the Λόγος, or Word assumed as a pledge and presage of his future incarnation.³⁹

Gill considered the appearances of the Angel of the Lord to be consistent with God’s attribute of invisibility. Although God’s nature is spirit and invisible and cannot be seen, these individual appearances are possible of the invisible God in light of the fact that Christians will one day “see him as he is.” Thus, the future beatific vision provided grounds for physical appearances of Christ prior to his Incarnation which served as “a pledge and presage of his future incarnation.”⁴⁰ In sum, Gill’s method to prove a plurality in the Godhead was to explicate the meaning of divine names through linguistic, grammatical, and historical analysis, examining God’s self-expressions related to his economic work, and, finally, to identify the Angel of Jehovah as Jehovah himself, thus proving a divine plurality.

³⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 40–41.

⁴⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 41. While MacDonald argued against the idea that the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament was Christ, he nevertheless provided a helpful and brief synopsis of its use throughout Church History. According to MacDonald, the “angel-Christ” view, as he called it, appeared first in Justin Martyr, whom he considered a “pioneer” of this position. Justin, he wrote, used this view of the Angel as Christ in order “to defend Christ’s authority and deity before Jews and pagan intellectuals.” Further, MacDonald documented that Clement of Alexandria supported the “angel-Christ” view through allegory and Hilary of Poitiers through his literal approach. MacDonald also argued that the “angel-Christ” view served to aid the Arian cause. He pointed out, however, that Athanasius defended this view as did Augustine, and that the fourth-century Formula of Sirmium anathematized anyone who did not hold it. The Reformers and Lutherans, MacDonald recounted, strongly held the view. For instance, Calvin considered Servetus’ denial of it as heresy and the Lutheran A. Calovius also counted its denial as heresy. MacDonald observed that the “angel-Christ” hypothesis remained strongly supported in nineteenth-century scholarship and continued to garner support into the mid-twentieth century. Thus, Gill’s use throughout his writings was neither new nor novel; instead, Gill was following ancient patterns of exegesis that began in the earliest stages of the church. William Graham MacDonald, “Christology and ‘the Angel of the Lord,’” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by His Former Students*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 325–28.

“A Trinity of Persons in the unity of the divine essence.”⁴¹ Gill next took to show that God’s plurality is specific and limited to three. Gill stated his belief the same way in both his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* and *The Doctrine of the Trinity* when he wrote that it “is neither more nor fewer than three; or, that there is a Trinity of persons in the unity of the divine essence.”⁴² Gill’s method of argumentation in both works was remarkably similar. Texts such as Genesis 1, which Gill chose to prove a plurality, he also used to illustrate that the divine plurality is a plurality of *three*. The structure in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* organized the points in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* under larger headings, with some changes in arrangement, but the material is largely consistent. One difference, however, is the beginning of each chapter: Gill began this chapter in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* by defining “person,” whereas in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* he began with a defense of the *Johannine Comma*.⁴³

Gill’s definition of a divine person. Sensitive to the Trinitarian disputes that had long been raging in England, and consistent with his concern for the spread of Sabellianism, Gill paused to explain his understanding of the term “person.”⁴⁴ Gill was cognizant, not only of the debates of his day, but the larger historical context of Trinitarian heresy across the centuries. In light of this, he prefaced his discussion of this term with an overview of its rise in history, “left any should think that they have got new

⁴¹ This heading is taken from the chapter title in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and from a line at the opening of Gill’s treatment on the matter in *The Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 135. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 45.

⁴² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 135. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 45.

⁴³ See the corresponding sections here: Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 45–73. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 135–40.

⁴⁴ Dixon believed that the understanding of the Persons was central to Trinitarian controversy in the seventeenth century: “Many, if not all, of the disputes surrounding the interpretation and acceptability of the doctrine [of the Trinity] revolved around the word and its usage.” Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 3. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 201.

light, when they have only embraced an old stale error, that has had its confutation over and over.”⁴⁵

Gill used Hebrews 1:3 as a proof text for the term “person,” although he recognized that some interpreters disagreed on the translation of *ὑπόστασις* and opted to translate it as “substance.” Gill appealed to the Greek Fathers as an authority, whom he said used it in the same sense.⁴⁶ In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, when writing to prove the personality of the Father, Gill elaborated his understanding of Hebrews 1:3 and the meaning of *ὑπόστασις*. He observed that *ὑπόστασις* is used five times in the New Testament (2 Cor 9:4; 11:17; Heb 3:14; 11:1) in a manner different than in Hebrews 1:3 and 2 Corinthians 1:11, with it denoting “the divine Being” in both Hebrews 3:14 and 11:1. This did not bother Gill, however, who cited John Owen to assert that the immediate context should govern the interpretation of the term in its specific context.⁴⁷ He further noted how *ὑπόστασις* had been translated as “subsistence” or “person” by many notable interpreters such as Erasmus, Calvin, and Piscator, and even some Greek Fathers, a few of whom wrote prior to the Council of Nicaea.⁴⁸ Gill reconciled the translation of *ὑπόστασις* by Latin authors to “substantia” with his use of “person,” although due to its “ambiguous signification, and having a tendency to lead persons to imagine that there were three distinct divine Beings, they left off using it; and rather chose the word *persona*, as less exceptional.”⁴⁹ Gill again quoted the same passage from John Owen’s Hebrews commentary to alleviate the perceived difficulty of *substantia*: “The composition of the word would denote ‘substantia,’ but so as to differ from and to add something unto *οὐσία*, ‘substance,’ or being; which in the divine nature can be

⁴⁵ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 45–46.

⁴⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 47.

⁴⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 79.

⁴⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 79–80.

⁴⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 80.

nothing but a special manner of subsistence.”⁵⁰ Following this appeal to Owen, Gill pointed out that the author of Hebrews was not focused on the identical nature of the Father and Son, but more so those aspects which evince their personal distinction. There is, then, identity of essence and distinction of persons:

Thus Christ is said to be the Son, by whom God hath, in these last days, spoke unto us; and the heir, who is so by his appointment; and by whom he made the worlds: He is the brightness of his glory. And so, though he is of the same nature with him, yet is he distinct from him, as the image is from the person, of whom it is the image.⁵¹

Here Gill made an important distinction between “person” and “personality,” which he employed when explicating the distinct personalities of each divine person:

Not that Christ is the image of his Father’s personality, for then, as the Father begat, which is his distinctive personal character, so must the Son. I distinguish between personality and person: Personality is the bare mode of subsisting; a Person, besides that connotes the nature or substance in, and with which he subsists. So that Christ is the image of the Father’s Person, as he is possessed of the whole divine nature or substance.⁵²

Thus, in Hebrews 1:3, the Son is the image of God the Father’s person in that he, like the Father, is a divine person who shares in the one divine essence. This did not mean, however, that God the Son shares the same “mode of subsisting” as the Father within the divine essence; that is, he does not share the Father’s personality.⁵³

⁵⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 80–81. The reference in the nineteenth-century Goold edition reprint: John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations*, vol. 3, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 19, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 85.

⁵¹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 81.

⁵² Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 81.

⁵³ Gill did not explicitly draw out this distinction between person and personality in his exposition of Hebrews 1:3, yet it was assumed when he brought together the idea that this verse speaks to both the unity of nature and distinction of persons between the Father and Son: “*And the express image of his person*; this intends much the same as the other phrase; namely, equality and sameness of nature, and distinction of persons; for if the Father is God, Christ must be so too; and if he is a person, his Son must be so likewise, or he can’t be the express image and character of him.” John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1809–1810 ed. (repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 9:375, Gill’s translation, emphasis original.

Another New Testament word from which the Trinitarian term *person* derived was πρόσωπον in 2 Corinthians 4:6. Gill noted that although some have translated this Greek word as “the face of Jesus Christ,” translating πρόσωπον as the “Person of Christ” better fits the context. Moreover, πρόσωπον is translated similarly in 2 Corinthians 1:11. Gill believed his understanding of πρόσωπον was consistent with Justin Martyr who used the term with reference to the divine persons, as well as Tertullian, whose use of the Latin *persona* referred to the divine persons.⁵⁴

Gill also cited Boethius (c. 480–c. 524), Marcus Friedrich Wendelin (1584–1652), and Daniel Waterland to establish his definition of *person*. Building these historical foundations, Gill harmonized Boethius’ definition of *persona* as a “substance of rational nature” with the Greek understanding of ὑπόστασις as “an individual subsistence of a rational nature” by appealing to Boethius’ own work.⁵⁵ But Gill’s definition ultimately rested upon the definitions of the Reformed authors Wendelin and Waterland. Gill cited Wendelin’s definition of a divine person in both *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*: “An individual, that subsists, is living, intelligent, incommunicable, is not sustained by another; nor is a part of another.” Gill immediately elaborated on this definition:

It is an individual, and therefore something singular: It differs from universal natures. It subsists of itself, and therefore is not an accident; which does not subsist in itself, but inheres in another. It is living; hence a stone, or any other inanimate being, is not a Person. It is intelligent, or understands; wherefore an horse, or any other brute, is not a Person. It is incommunicable, and so it is distinguished from essence, which is communicable to more. It is not sustained by another; hence the human nature of Christ is no Person, because it is sustained by the person of the Word. It is not a part of another; hence a human soul is no Person, because it is a part of man.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 47–48.

⁵⁵ Godet insightfully makes this observation. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 203. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 48.

⁵⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 48–49.

Gill promptly put forward two additional definitions by Waterland, “In one word, I say, with Dr. Waterland, ‘That each divine Person is an individual intelligent agent: But as subsisting in one undivided substance; they are altogether, in that respect, but one undivided intelligent agent,’” and, “A single person is an intelligent agent, having the distinctive characters of I, Thou, He, and not divided or distinguished into more intelligent agents, capable of the same characters.” From either of these definitions, Gill concluded that a person could be understood as “an individual, that subsists, lives, understands, &c,” which is true for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁵⁷ Godet recognized that Gill’s shortened definition followed Wendelin’s, which he then applied to the Father and Son in both his *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*.⁵⁸

Gill’s defense of 1 John 5:7 as proof of God’s Triunity. Gill’s definition of a divine person was crucial to establishing a divine Triunity in Scripture. So also, Gill also thought, was the establishment of the legitimacy of 1 John 5:7—often known today as the *Comma Johanneum*. Gill’s treatment of 1 John 5:7 was an addition to his argument for a Trinity of persons in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, as it was not included in the corresponding chapter in his previous *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. As the eighteenth century carried on without much relief from the battles over the Trinity, one can understand why Gill thought that a defense of this text would prove beneficial to his congregation—the immediate audience of his *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*.

Gill saw in 1 John 5:7 as a strong proof that brought together his prior argumentation for God’s unity and plurality while additionally proving a Trinity of persons. In his translation, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the

⁵⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 49.

⁵⁸ Godet also recognized that Gill considered Waterland’s definition an “alternative,” which seems correct. I would also add that not only is it an alternative, but it is encapsulated in Wendelin’s definition which Gill follows such that his final definition, building on Wendelin, is more expansive though still consistent with that of Waterland. Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill,” 204. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 160, 162.

Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one,” divinity is established in the three being considered one, whose witness is termed “the witness of God” (1 John 5:9). A Trinity in one essence is evinced in their being called “one,” which Gill commented “respects not a mere unity of testimony, but of nature; for it is not said of them, as of the witnesses on earth, that they *agree in one*; but that they *are one*.” Furthermore, there is a Trinity evidenced in that they are called “*three*” and a “Trinity of Persons” because the three divine Persons are distinguished from each other and given “personal action.”⁵⁹ Gill immediately moved to cut off any possible Sabellian interpretation by noting that the testimony of each Person,

Cannot be said of mere names and characters; nor be understood of one person under different names; for if the one living and true God only bears record, first under the character of a Father, then under the character of a Son, or the Word, and then under the character of the Holy Ghost; testimony, indeed, would be bore three times, but there would be but one testifier, and not three, as the apostle asserts.⁶⁰

Gill defended the veracity of his translation from multiple angles, which he acknowledged had been under siege, most notably, by anti-Trinitarians. Gill reasoned through its absence in the Syriac, Latin, and Greek texts, cited early support from theologians as early as Clement of Alexandria, and further pointed out that the passage is included in a later Erasmus translation and even a Socinian version. Furthermore, Gill argued that the immediate context of the passage necessitated his translation. Despite his passionate appeal to the text’s veracity, Gill did not believe the text was necessary to prove the Trinity. For, its basis lay “on the whole current and universal consent of scripture, where it is written as with a sunbeam.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 135, emphasis original.

⁶⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 135.

⁶¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 136.

Further proofs for a Trinity of persons. Gill, following the biblical material, derived his understanding of Triunity from the acts that God performed in history. Thus, Gill arranged his proofs under headings related to God’s acts of creation, providence, salvation, the application of salvation, and, finally, to Christian worship and prayer.⁶²

To argue for a Trinity of Persons, Gill’s worked backward from God’s economic workings to his immanent Triune existence. In his arguments based on creation, Gill wrote, “as by these [works of creation] the eternal power and godhead are made manifest, so in them are plain traces of a Trinity of persons.” Gill established that the work of creation is attributed to all three Persons—Father (Acts 4:24, 27), Son (John 1:3), and Spirit (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; Ps 104:30). He highlighted Psalm 33:6 to demonstrate that in a single text all three persons are identified as agents of creation. Before moving to his next point Gill specified that all three divine Persons were involved in the creation of mankind (Mal 2:10; Isa 54:5; Job 33:4) and that “this plurality was neither more nor fewer than three.”⁶³ Gill reasoned similarly before when he wrote, “That as there was a plurality concerned in the formation of man, this plurality was neither more, not fewer than three; which are the Father, the Word, and the Spirit; and which three are but one God.”⁶⁴

Gill continued his Trinitarian reading of Scripture onto God’s acts of providence, connecting the Trinitarian work of creation to God’s governing hand of providence in which all three Persons played a part. Gill evinced his Trinitarian understanding of God’s providence by recounting God’s salvation of Israel from Egypt and desert journey in Isaiah 63:7–14, a common proof-text among sixteenth and

⁶² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 137–40. See similarly, Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 51–73.

⁶³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 137.

⁶⁴ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 54.

seventeenth century reformed theologians.⁶⁵ In Gill’s development of the passage, Jehovah (the Father), the “angel of his presence” (the Son), and the Holy Spirit are all three mentioned in such a way to prove a “Trinity of Persons in the Deity” since “there are three distinctly mentioned; and to them distinct personal characters and actions are ascribed.”⁶⁶

Gill utilized the same approach to examine God’s Triune “works of grace,” in which he included the inspiration of Scripture, the Covenant of Grace, and the economy of salvation. Generally speaking, Scripture taught that “the election of men to salvation is usually ascribed to the Father; redemption, or the impetration of salvation, to the Son; and sanctification, or the application of salvation, to the Spirit.” Gill then highlighted three passages in which all three divine Persons are described as accomplishing the work of salvation (1 Pet 1:2; 2 Thess 2:13, 14; Eph 1:3–6, 7, 11, 13, 14).⁶⁷ For Gill, the revelation of God’s Trinity in the economy of salvation was such that he exclaimed,

The doctrine of the Trinity is often represented as a speculative point, of no great moment whether it is believed or no, too mysterious and curious to be pryed into, and that it had better be let alone than meddled with; but, alas! it enters into the whole of our salvation, and all the parts of it; into all the doctrines of the gospel, and into the experience of the saints; there is no doing without it.⁶⁸

Gill also cited the specific works of Christ as Mediator as evidence of God’s Trinity. The sending of the Son, the Incarnation, Christ’s baptism, death, and the

⁶⁵ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:224–25. See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, *First through Tenth Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 276 [3.26.IX]. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, vol. 2, *Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Michael T. Spangler, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 501 [1.2.24.III].

⁶⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 54. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 137. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:225.

⁶⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 137–38.

⁶⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 138. John Owen similarly noted the essential nature of the doctrine of the Trinity to the Christian religion: “Deny the Trinity, and all the means of the communication of grace, with the whole of the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ, fall to the ground.” John Owen, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures; with an Answer to that Inquiry, How We Know the Scriptures to be the Word of God*, in *WJO*, 16:340–42. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:148.

resurrection were all understood as Trinitarian works that evince three distinct, divine Persons. Additionally, the application of salvation, such as in the work of justification, adoption, regeneration, and anointing, are all Trinitarian acts.⁶⁹ Gill's final proof concerned worship and prayer. For example, baptism, "a very solemn part of divine worship" is done in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Furthermore, Gill argued from a host of biblical texts that "God alone is to be invoked in prayer, and petitions are directed sometimes to one Person, and sometimes to another." Gill's final proof came from 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen," from which he concluded there is "a Trinity of Persons in the unity of the divine essence."⁷⁰

At the end of his argumentation in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill asserted that God's plurality makes sense in light of his nature and divine happiness that is grounded in *perichoresis*:

[A] plurality of Persons in the Godhead, seems necessary from the nature of God himself, and his most complete happiness; for as he is the best, the greatest and most perfect of Beings, his happiness in himself must be the most perfect and complete; now happiness lies not in solitude, but in society; hence the three personal distinctions in Deity, seem necessary to perfect happiness, which lies in that most glorious, inconceivable, and inexpressible communion the three Persons have with one another; and which arises from the incomprehensible in-being and unspeakable nearness they have to each other, John x. 38. And xiv. 10, 11.⁷¹

The Son: A Distinct and Divine Person

The presence of modalistic (Sabellianism) and subordinationist (Arianism and Socinian) heresies in part shaped the structure of Gill's theological works on the Trinity.

⁶⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 138–40.

⁷⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 140, Gill's translation.

⁷¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 140. At the conclusion of his chapter proving there are three Persons in the Godhead in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill may have alluded to Samuel Clarke's *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* when he wrote, "Now this account I may venture to call the scripture doctrine of the Trinity. And though I do not suppose that every proof I have produced, carries equal evidence in it; yet, when taken altogether, that man must willfully shut his eyes, that cannot see plain intimations of a Trinity of Persons in one God, in the scriptures." Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 73. See Godet's discussion of *perichoresis* in Gill here: Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 207–8.

These rival viewpoints required Gill to address the Son's distinct personality and divinity in order to establish the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Richard Muller described this manner of argumentation among the Reformed orthodox thus:

As also the case of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Reformed orthodox typically present two sets of closely interrelated arguments, one concerning the full divinity or deity of the Son, the other concerning the personhood or individual subsistence of the Son. The order of these sets of arguments varies, as does the order of argument within each set. The reason for this exhaustive and potentially somewhat cumbersome approach is certainly the nature of the various heresies—some of which acknowledge the divinity of the Son or Word but deny personhood, instead identifying the Word as a power of the Godhead, namely adoptionism or dynamic Monarchianism; some of which acknowledged the personhood of the Son or Word, but deny his fully divinity, namely Arianism. In their own day, the Reformed orthodox encountered Arian or Arianizing and Socinian and Socinianizing thinkers who represented these particular problems, with the Arians tending toward an identification of the Son as a “person” but as less than divine and some of the Socinian or Socinianizing writers reducing the Word to a power of the Godhead. Thus, the orthodox argue that the Word is both fully divine and an individual subsistence in the Godhead, usually in that order.⁷²

Gill presented both of these “interrelated arguments” in both *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. In the former, two of his four chapters on the Son were occasioned by these arguments, and, in the latter, the kinds of two arguments were combined into a single chapter together.⁷³ Gill's structure of argumentation then, not only reveals a reliance on Reformed orthodox patterns, but the presence of these heresies during Gill's ministry.

The Son: a distinct person. Just as Gill derived a Trinity of persons within the Godhead by working backwards from God's work in the economy of salvation, so he worked similarly to prove that the Son was a distinct person in the divine essence. The substance and order of his argumentation in both *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* was identical where Gill sought to prove that the Son was a distinct

⁷² Muller, *PRRD*, 4:299–300.

⁷³ In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, the material is found in chapter 6 “Concerning the Deity of the Word” and in chapter 8 “Concerning the Personality of the Son.” Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 103–19, 151–54. In *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, these arguments are found in chapter 30, “Of the Distinct Personality, and Deity of the Son.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 162–67.

person in the divine nature. By locating this material at the end of his treatment of the Son in both works, these arguments provided supplemental, or additional arguments proving the Son is a distinct and divine person. Having already demonstrated a Trinitarian plurality in the Godhead and discussed the nature of Christ's Sonship in both places, these arguments aimed at further rebutting the error of Sabellianism by further emphasizing that the Son is a *distinct* person in the divine essence.⁷⁴

Drawing on Hebrews 1:3, Gill concluded that the Son is an image of the Father's person *as a divine person*. He is not, therefore, an image of the Father as a human mediator, a human being, or in his office of mediator. Furthermore, Gill argued, the Son can rightly be considered a divine person:

The definition of a Person agrees with him: he is an individual, distinct, though not separate from the divine nature, he has in common with the Father and the Spirit; he subsists of himself in that nature distinctly, and independently; is not part of another, the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells in him; nor is his human nature, which he assumed in time, a part of his person, nor adds anything to his personality; but being taken up into union with his person, subsists in it; he has life in himself, and is the living God; is intelligent, has understanding and will; knows himself, his Father and the Spirit; and all creatures and things, and does whatsoever he pleases.⁷⁵

Once he had established this definition as applicable to the Son, Gill began to demonstrate the ways that Scripture reveals the Son to be such a distinct and divine person.

In both *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill first argued that the Son's eternal generation from the Father established him as a distinct and divine person. The argument from eternal generation, as this dissertation will demonstrate below, was the foundation of Gill's Trinitarianism as it was the basis for establishing personal distinctions within the Godhead. Thus, the rest of Gill's arguments

⁷⁴ While the substance and order of Gill's points are the same, the numeration is not. Gill numbered some points inconsistently between the two works. In the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, this material comprises the content of chapter 8, "Concerning the Personality of the Son." Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 151–54. In *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, these arguments can be found in chapter 30, "Of the Distinct Personality, and Deity of the Son." Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 162–63.

⁷⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 162.

for the Son's distinct personality flowed from the reality of his eternal generation. Nevertheless, Gill further argued that the Son is demonstrated to be distinct by "[a]ll those scriptures which declare that Christ was with God the Father, and was as one brought up with him, and the like."⁷⁶ Among these Scriptures was John 1:1 and Proverbs 8:30, both of which Gill argued were proofs of the Son's eternal generation. But regardless of whether or not they proved his eternal generation, these kinds of texts revealed two distinct persons existing together in eternity.⁷⁷

The remainder of Gill's arguments for the Son's distinct personality rested upon the Son's works *ad intra* and *ad extra*.⁷⁸ Gill believed that the Son's personality could be evinced in his *ad intra* work of becoming the mediator and head of the covenant of grace. Gill had Sabellianism in mind when he asserted that "a mere name and character could not be said to be set up, to be covenanted with, or to have persons and things committed to his care and charge." Thus, Gill concluded, "and these shew him to be a distinct person from him who set him up, and entrusted him with all these persons and things."⁷⁹ The same reality was true of Christ's *ad extra* work of being sent into the world as savior: "if he was not a person, but a mere name, he could not be sent; and he must be

⁷⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 152 [160]. In the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill referred the reader to his chapter on the Son as the Word in the 1731 edition of *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 162.

⁷⁷ As this chapter will show, while Gill did not think that Proverbs 8 proved the Son's eternal generation in the early stages of his ministry, later he did. Early in his ministry Gill thought that "[t]he phrases of setting up, possessing, bringing forth, and bringing up, seem rather to refer to his mediatorial office." This did not mean, however, that they were not proofs of the Son's distinct and divine existence. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 147–48 [155–56]. Another text that Gill cited in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* was 1 John 1:2. While Gill did not seek to prove eternal generation from this text, it is close in his mind. He did, however, highlight how the text demonstrates the Son was an eternal and divine person, distinct from the Father. He commented on 1 John 1:2, "that is, which life, eternal life, and Word of life, was from the beginning, or from all eternity with God the father; which phrase is expressive of the eternal existence of Christ, as the Word and Son of God, with his Father, he relation to him, his oneness in nature, and equality with him, and his personal distinction from him." Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:617.

⁷⁸ Gill articulated this distinction between "internal" and "external" acts in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 172.

⁷⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 162. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 152 [160].

distinct from him that sent him; he that sends, and he that is sent, cannot be one and the same person or else it must be said, that he sent himself, which is too gross and absurd to be admitted.”⁸⁰ Gill enumerated other works from which the Son can be evinced as a distinct person, including his atoning work on the cross, his ascension and session in heaven, his work as advocate and intercessor for his covenant people, his future judgment to come, and his presence with the saints to whom he will be “represented as the object of their praise, wonder, and worship to all eternity.”⁸¹ Gill’s method for proving the Son is a distinct person in the Godhead not only relied on texts that spoke of his eternal co-existence with and generation from the Father, but from his internal and external works that evince him as such.

The Son: a divine person. Gill’s arguments for the Son’s deity followed the Reformed orthodox pattern of Markius, Owen, Mastricht, Ridgley, and Turretin by proving his divinity from his names, attributes, works, and worship.⁸² This line of argumentation, Muller explains, is an “elaboration” of Reformation and early Reformed orthodox arguments; that is, it is “a more detailed topical division of material already found in the order and arrangement of Reformed theologies looking back to Calvin’s *Institutes*.”⁸³ Muller observed its prevalence and consistency among the Reformed orthodox, writing that “[t]hese grounds of argument are stated by a large number of the Reformed orthodox and are repeated, in only slightly varied forms, in the discussions of

⁸⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 162.

⁸¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 162–63. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 153–54 [161–62]. These final two points were not numbered in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, and Gill added the point about Christ’s presence with the saints in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, whereas in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* he only mentioned that Christ will “be the object of the saints praise, admiration, and worship, throughout the endless ages of eternity.” Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 154 [162]. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 163.

⁸² Muller, *PRRD*, 4:302, cf. 302n123.

⁸³ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:149–50.

each of the persons.”⁸⁴ The next paragraphs will only briefly sketch these arguments from which Gill sought to prove the Son’s divine nature.

Gill contrasted his understanding of the Son’s deity directly with that of Arianism and Socinianism. The Son is “[n]ot a made or created God, as say the Arians Nor God by office, as say the Socinians.” Nor was he, Gill asserted, “God by name only.” Rather, Gill contended that the Son “is God by nature; as these were not; having the whole essence and nature of God in him.”⁸⁵ Gill first sought to demonstrate the Son’s deity from his names. According to Gill, the Son was given names that only belong to God, such as “Ejeh, I AM that I AM” (Ex 3:14), which in John 8:58 Jesus applied to himself. Foremost among the names is Jehovah, “which is incommunicable to a creature, and peculiar to the most High” (Ps 83:18).⁸⁶ Since this name is incommunicable and belongs only to the Most High God, Gill asserted that “If therefore I prove that Jesus Christ is called *Jehovah*, or that this name is given to him, I prove him to be the Most High God.”⁸⁷ Muller has described the importance of this argument:

This particular argument is, moreover, the point at which a refutation of Socinian views first registered in the doctrine of the divine names bears its ultimate fruit: the Socinians labored to show that Jehovah was not the proper name of God, belonging to God alone—and the orthodox exegetes had rather nicely shown that all of the exceptions noted by the Socinians were not in fact applications of the Holy Name to creatures or things.⁸⁸

Following the Orthodox, Gill explained that any alleged instance of *Jehovah* being applied to a non-divine entity was wrongfully understood. For instance, Gill argued that

⁸⁴ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:245–46.

⁸⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 163.

⁸⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 163.

⁸⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 104–5.

⁸⁸ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:303.

this name was not “given to priests and judges, Deut. xix. 17. for though he is joined with them, this only designs his presence in judiciary affairs.”⁸⁹

Gill additionally explained texts in which “Christ is absolutely called God.” Gill produced Psalm 45:6 as a proof of this, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,” noting that in the next verse “he is distinguished from God his Father.” Furthermore, Gill pointed out that these “words are expressly applied to him as the Son of God” in Hebrews 1:8.⁹⁰ Lastly, Gill noticed that “Christ is called God” with personal pronouns and epithets. Instances with pronouns revealing his as God, such as “our God” (Isa 35:9; 40:3), “your God” (Isa 35:4, 5), “their God” (Luke 1:16), and “my Lord, and my God” (John 10:28) were all proof of the Son’s divinity. Furthermore, Christ is called “Immanuel” (Matt 1:22), “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16), and by other epithets such as “the mighty God” (Isa 9:6), “over all God blessed forever” (Rom 9:5), “the Great God” (Titus 2:13), and “the true God” (1 John 5:20), among others.⁹¹ Gill’s conclusion from these passages is that “[s]ince then Christ is so frequently called God, with these additional epithets, which are peculiar to the one only God, it follows, that he must be truly and properly God.”⁹²

Continuing to follow the Reformed orthodox order of argumentation, Gill’s next proofs for the Son’s deity were taken from “the divine perfections he is possessed of.” Gill believed that consistent with Colossians 2:9, “for in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead,” and John 16:15, “All things that the Father hath, are mine,” that the Son possessed all the divine attributes as the Father: “There is no perfection essential to Deity,

⁸⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 164. Muller explained how the Reformed orthodox responded to these Socinian claims, which bears strong similarity to Gill: “and the orthodox exegetes had rather nicely shown that all of the exceptions noted by Socinians were not in fact applications of the Holy Name to creatures or things.” Muller, *PRRD*, 4:303.

⁹⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 164.

⁹¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 165. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 109–12.

⁹² Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 112.

but is in him; nor is there any that the Father has, but he has likewise.”⁹³ These perfections included the Son’s necessary self-existence and independence, his eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, and immutability.⁹⁴ The third block of arguments were taken from Christ’s works, which Gill stated “are the same that are done by the Father.”⁹⁵ Gill carefully articulated the sense in which the Son worked with the Father to avoid any hint of subordinationism, explaining that the Father and Son work together as “co-efficient causes: tho’ they work in distinction, yet not in contradiction to each other.”⁹⁶ The works that Gill ascribed to the Son were the creation and sustaining of the universe, various miracles that attest to his divinity, the efficacious redemption of the elect, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgement to come.⁹⁷

Gill’s final proof of the Son’s deity was taken from texts that demonstrate the Son receives worship that can only be given to God. For instance, Gill produced Hebrews 1:6, “Let all the angels of God worship him,” as proof that angels worship him. To prove that men are commanded to worship the Son, Gill paraphrased Psalm 2:12 to mean that “*all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.*”⁹⁸ Gill also wrote that the hearts and souls of believers are directed to the Son in a manner only appropriate to God: “He is the object of the saints love, hope, faith, trust, and dependence; which he would not be, if he was a creature.”⁹⁹ Additionally, both public and private acts of worship are directed towards him. Baptism, “which is a solemn act of religious worship,

⁹³ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 112–13, Gill’s translations.

⁹⁴ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 113–15. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 165–66.

⁹⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 166.

⁹⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 116.

⁹⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 166. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 116–18.

⁹⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 166, Gill’s translation.

⁹⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 119.

is ordered to be administered in his name, as well as in the name of the Father, and of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁰ And prayer, which Gill believed was “another branch of religious worship, is often made to Christ; and not by a single person only . . . but by whole churches and communities; who are said in every place to call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹⁰¹ Gill was certain that the worship of Christ definitively proved of his deity. Of all the arguments he put forward, the worship owed to Christ was the most validating of his deity:

In fine, nothing more strongly proves the divinity of Christ than his being the object of religious worship, of which God is always jealous; nor would he ever admit him a partner in it, was he not, in nature and substance, equal to him. From the whole, we need not scruple to assert the Deity of Christ in the fullest and strongest terms; which is an article of the utmost moment and importance and furnishes out the most solid argument and foundation for faith, peace, joy, and comfort.¹⁰²

The Necessity of Eternal Generation

After Gill established his understanding of the Godhead as one essence existing in three divine persons in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, he then moved to discuss the nature of their personal distinctions. In doing so, Gill used terminology common among Protestant scholastic thinkers from the post-reformation period. Only after Gill demonstrated that God exists as a plurality of persons in the Godhead—which he defined as a plurality of three persons—did he proceed to explain the manner by which each person is distinguished in the divine essence.¹⁰³

Whereas much of the material in Gill’s *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* closely followed the chapters on the unity, plurality, and Trinity of the Godhead in *The Doctrine*

¹⁰⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 119.

¹⁰¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 167.

¹⁰² Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 119.

¹⁰³ Considering Gill’s polemical context, which required him to define the Trinity against various heresies, Sabellianism and Socinianism chief among them, it was important for Gill to explain these distinctions in detail. It is no surprise, then, that this chapter in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* is the longest in his first book. Only his chapter on the doctrine of Scripture comes close in length. See Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 140–60.

of the Trinity, Gill's chapter on "the personal relations; or, relative properties which distinguish the three divine persons in the deity" in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* marked a crucial expansion in Gill's articulation of the Trinity. No corresponding chapter existed in the earlier *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, although there is some material overlap. In this twenty-eighth chapter of his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill put forth his strongest arguments for the *sine qua non* of Trinitarianism: eternal generation. Although Gill defined the personal distinction for each of the three Persons of the Trinity, the lion's share of this expansion revolved around the Son's distinguishing mode of subsistence, namely, eternal generation.¹⁰⁴ The relative space he allotted to defending eternal generation evinces the intellectual plausibility of its Arian, Socinian, and Sabellian opposition at Gill's time of writing. Not only that, Gill's detailed defense revealed that he believed eternal generation was foundational, central, and indispensable to maintain the orthodox, biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Gill revealed self-awareness of his relatively lengthy treatment of eternal generation and provided a justification: "I have been longer upon the Sonship of Christ, because it is that upon which the distinction in the Godhead depends; take that away, and it cannot be proved there is any distinction of persons in it."¹⁰⁵ Standing on this conviction, Gill refused to concede any ground to opponents of eternal generation.

Intra-Trinitarian Distinction Defined

Gill believed that God has an essential unity and plurality that should be understood in terms of Triunity, or a "Trinity of persons in the Godhead."¹⁰⁶ He employed terminology common among Protestant Scholastics to explain how the

¹⁰⁴ Going by the 1839 edition of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Gill devoted a half page to the Father's distinct personal relation, slightly more than a half page to the Holy Spirit's distinct personal relation, but more than fifteen pages to the Son's distinct personal relation.

¹⁰⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 159.

¹⁰⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 140.

distinction between the three Trinitarian persons ought to be conceived.¹⁰⁷ He was cognizant of the fact that correctly distinguishing the persons was essential to warding off Sabellianism:

Since there are Three who are the one God; and these Three are not one and the same Person, but three different Persons, there must be something which distinguishes them from each other; and the distinction between them is not merely *nominal*, which is no distinction at all; as when the Sabellians say, God is one Person, having three names, Father, Son, and Spirit.¹⁰⁸

In Gill's mind, a nominal distinction was not an actual distinction whatsoever, but was rather akin to a man going by three different names. Instead, Gill contended that the intra-Trinitarian distinction is *modal*, *real*, and *personal*:

[N]or is the distinction merely *modal*; rather *real modal*; for though there are three modes of subsisting in the Deity, and each Person has a distinct mode, yet the phrase seems not strong enough; for the distinction is *real* and *personal*; for Three in the Godhead are not barely three modes, but three distinct Persons in a different mode of subsisting, who are really distinct from each other; so that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, nor the holy Spirit either the Father or the Son.¹⁰⁹

This *modal* distinction, for Gill, meant that each Person subsists in a different manner or mode within the one divine essence. The *modal* distinction provided one of the most basic ways of speaking about God's Trinity: "There's but one essence, though there are different modes of subsisting in it."¹¹⁰ This distinction is also *real* in that each Person is actually distinct from the other two in his particular mode of subsistence. Gill added that the distinction is also *personal*, meaning that each mode of subsistence belongs to one of the divine Persons. It logically follows, then, that the Persons are not interchangeable:

¹⁰⁷ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:189–95. Cf. Sebastian Rehnman, "The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 395–400.

¹⁰⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 140–41, emphasis original.

¹⁰⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 141, emphasis original.

¹¹⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 13.

“the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, nor the holy Spirit either the Father or the Son.”¹¹¹

Gill’s notion of a modal distinction between persons was commonplace among Reformed Scholastics and one he used regularly. He employed the term to explain how God could be one in essence and yet three persons. He reconciled God’s unity and plurality through this modal distinction by asserting that each Person has “a different mode of subsisting” within the Godhead.¹¹² He utilized the terminology *real modal* as an equivalent of the Latin words *realiter* and *modaliter* articulated by other reformed orthodox theologians.¹¹³ Not every Reformed theologian, however, conceived of the distinction as modal. Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), for instance, preferred a form of the *real* distinction.¹¹⁴ There were other options among the Reformed as to the nature of these distinctions, which Richard Muller summarized from the writings of Bernardinus De Moore of Leiden (1709–1780):

De Moore notes five possible ways of arguing the distinction: First, *ratio ratiocinatae*, by reason of rational analysis, defined specifically as having a foundation in the thing (*res*) that is the object of the reasoning. Second, *formaliter*, in the sense that “the essence is formally constituted in personal existence” by the distinctions between the persons. Third, *modaliter*, the sense that a mode or manner of a thing’s subsistence can [be] distinguished from the thing itself—reflecting the identification of the persons as ‘modes of subsistence.’ In this sense, ‘the persons are distinguished from the divine essence and among themselves not *realiter* or *essentialiter*, as a thing from a thing, but modally as a mode from a thing and modes of a thing from one another.’ Fourth, *realiter*, which, De Moore notes, is the distinction favored by the ‘Auctor,’ Markius, in an attempt to state a distinction that is neither merely rational nor essential. Such a real distinction, De Moore adds, is not what the scholastics call *distinction realis maior*, such as can be made between a thing and a thing (*inter res & res*), as if there were in the Trinity distinctions between one and another thing (*aliud & aliud*) or between one and another essence—this would violate the unity of God. Rather it is a *distinction realis minor*,

¹¹¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 141.

¹¹² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 141, 142. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 13, 81, 155.

¹¹³ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 222, 306. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:278–80 [3.27.I–XV].

¹¹⁴ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:192.

such as can be made between ‘a thing and the modes of a thing, or between the modes themselves,’ in short, a restatement of the modal distinction. (Arguably, this *distinction realis minor* is precisely what Aquinas indicated by a real distinction of relational opposition.) Fifth, drawing on Maresius, De Moore notes that one can also speak of a *distinction personalis*, given the grounding of the distinction in the personal properties of the Father, Son, and Spirit—but here, again, De Moore understands the point to be identical with the modal distinction or the *distinction realis minor*.¹¹⁵

Avoiding this technical discussion taken up by other protestant scholastics, Gill defined his *real modal* distinction concisely in a manner consistent with the above definition of a modal, or *distinction realis minor*. Francis Turretin (1623–1687) can be included among those Reformed Scholastics who opted for the “minor real distinction.”¹¹⁶ Turretin recognized the seeming difference among theologians who opted for either a *real* or *modal* distinction, harmonizing them by what he defined as a “real minor distinction”:

Although theologians may seem in some measure to differ from each other here (some urging a real, others only a modal distinction), yet they are easily reconciled. Those who say that they differ really are nevertheless unwilling to express it as a real major distinction (*distinctionem realem majorem*) which exists between things and things (as if there was in the Trinity a difference of things or one and another essence, which would be opposed to the unity and simplicity of the divine essence). But they say it is only a real minor distinction (*distinctionem realem minorem*, as the Scholastics have it) which exists between a thing and the mode of the thing or between the modes themselves, which coincides with the modal distinction held by others. Although in God there is not one and another thing (i.e., different essences), still there is one and another subject (a difference of persons).¹¹⁷

Furthermore, Gill’s understanding of a *real modal* distinction closely followed that of Petrus van Mastricht, although he differed with Mastricht by insisting on a *personal* distinction:

And again others who intend to avoid tritheism state that the persons differ modally, as one mode from another, not indeed by reasoning alone, but in reality, which they express with the two words conjoined, by saying that they differ really modally, that is, as one mode from another, not by reason only but in reality. And this indeed

¹¹⁵ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:192–93.

¹¹⁶ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:194. Passing over this technical discussion owes likely to the ecclesial context in which Gill wrote this material.

¹¹⁷ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:279 [3.27.XI], emphasis original.

satisfies me the most. Nevertheless, there are those whom none of these please; instead they judge that it must be said that the persons differ personally. But what is this to say except that the persons differ as persons, while nothing is said about how one person differs from another?¹¹⁸

The next question that concerned Gill was what specifically made these modal distinctions between the persons. Whatever it was, Gill believed that the distinctions must be eternal, for God is eternal. Since God is eternal, the distinctions do not depend on any of God's *ad extra* works which are "common to all the three Persons" and are "depending upon his pleasure." These external works "do not make God to be, but to appear to be what he is." Gill argued the personal distinctions are based in God's necessary existence and are thus not by will: "[I]f the one God then necessarily existed, and the three Persons are the one God, they must necessarily exist; and if they exist as three distinct Persons, that which gives them the distinction, must be necessary also, or arise from the necessity of nature; as God is, and the manner in which he is, so the distinction in him is by necessity." Gill quickly clarified that although the distinction is eternal and according to God's necessary existence, the divine nature does not distinguish the Persons because they all share fully in it. In his words, "the whole fulness of the Godhead is in each [Person]."¹¹⁹

What, then, distinguishes the divine persons in eternity past, as it were? Gill defined the distinctions this way: "it is the personal relations, or distinctive relative properties, which belong to each Person, which distinguish them one from another."¹²⁰ Gill defined these relative properties "as paternity in the first Person, filiation in the second, and spiration in the third." Gill further elaborates these relations as "begetting," "begotten," and "breathed," respectively:

¹¹⁸ Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:504 [1.2.24.IX]. This is not to say, however, that Mastricht did not believe that the Three who are distinguished *realiter modaliter* do not differ as persons, because they each fit the definition of a person (see 2:512 [1.2.24.XVIII]). Muller points out the similarity between Gill and Mastricht here: Muller, *PRRD*, 4:185n208.

¹¹⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 141–42.

¹²⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142.

[I]t is *begetting*, Psalm ii.7. which peculiarly belongs to the first, and is never ascribed to the second and third; which distinguishes him from them both; and gives him, with great propriety, the name of the Father; and it is being *begotten*, that is the personal relation, or relative property of the second Person; hence called, “the only begotten of the Father,” John i.14. which distinguishes him from the first and third, and gives him the name of the Son; and the relative property, or personal relation of the third Person is, that he is *breathed* by the first and second Persons.¹²¹

Gill’s expression above is similar to that of Edward Leigh (1602–1671), who provides a concise definition of each personal property:

The personal property of the Father is to beget, that is, not to multiply his substance by production, but to communicate his substance to the same. The Sonne is said to be begotten, that is, to have the whole substance from the Father by communication. The Holy Ghost is said to proceed or to be breathed forth, to receive his substance by proceeding from the Father and the Sonne joyntly; in regard of which he is called the Spirit of the Father, and the Spirit of the Sonne both, Gal. 4.6. The Father onely begetteth, the Sonne onely is begotten, and the holy Ghost onely proceedeth.¹²²

While Gill, as this dissertation will later demonstrate, differed from Leigh and others on the idea that the essence is communicated among divine persons, the statement of each Person’s distinct property is fundamentally consistent.

These definitions are fundamental to Gill’s doctrine of the Trinity and form the chapter title in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, “Of the personal relations; or, relative properties which distinguish the three divine persons in the Deity.” At first glance it appears that Gill treated the terms “personal relations” and “relative properties” as synonyms. It is important, however, to understand these terms in the scholastic context in which that had been developed. While personal relations and relative properties both point to a similar reality, there are important distinctions between them. Among the Reformed orthodox, properties (the Latin *proprietas*) denoted “the peculiar mode of subsisting and diacritical (*diakritikon*) character by which this or that person is

¹²¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142, emphasis original.

¹²² Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity Consisting of Three Bookes: The First of Which Handling the Scripture or Word of God, Treateth of Its Divine Authority, the Cononical Bookes, the Authentick Edition, and Several Versions; the End, Properties, and Interpretation of Scripture: The Second Handling God, Sheweth That There Is a God, and What He Is, in His Essence and Severall Attributes, and Likewise the Distinction of Persons in the Divine Essence. The Third Handleth the Three Principall Words of God, Decree, Creation, and Providence* (London: E. Griffin, 1646), 129 [II.XVI]. This is cited in Muller, *PPRD*, 4:186. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:281 [3.27.XVII].

constituted in his personal being and is distinguished from the others.”¹²³ In short, it refers to “a distinguishing characteristic of a subsistence not shared with other subsistences.”¹²⁴ Consistent with this understanding of *proprietas*, Gill’s use of relative property indicates that each person has such a unique mode of subsistence, that is, relative property. This relative property, according to his own definition of a person and the paragraph immediately above, is incommunicable to the others persons.¹²⁵ Gill’s use of personal relations also follows the patterns of Reformed Scholasticism. As *proprietas* gets to the unique mode of subsistence belonging to each person, the personal relations (*relatio*) “intimates the same property inasmuch as it indicates the relation (*schesis*) of one person to another.”¹²⁶ And as these terms suggest, within the Triune God it is impossible to speak of one person’s personal properties as anything but a *relative* property, or personal *relation* to the other members of the Godhead. It is the Son’s filiation, his distinctive property, that distinguishes him from the other two persons and provides their relation. In Gill’s own words, “From generation arises the relation, and from relation distinct personality.” Not only that, it is from this personal distinguishing characteristic that he is given the name Son.¹²⁷

¹²³ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:257 [3.23.IV]. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:186–87.

¹²⁴ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:187. See also Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 296.

¹²⁵ So similarly in Turretin, “as to personal properties—which are not common to the single persons, but singular to each person (and so incommunicable because they agree with the persons as persons and constitute the very incommunicability of the persons).” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:280 [3.27.XVII]. Compare also with Mastricht *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:503, 512 [1.2.24.VIII, XVIII].

¹²⁶ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:257 [3.23.IV]. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:187. See also Muller’s definition of *relation personalis*: “in the doctrine of the Trinity, the incommunicable property or mode of subsistence that identifies the individual persons of the Trinity in relation to each other.” Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 310.

¹²⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:281 [3.27.XVIII–XIX.]

The *sin qua non* of Trinitarianism

Gill brought his discussion of the personal relations to a head as he explained how these eternal distinctions are grounded in the Godhead. In doing so, he expressed his conviction that without the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation, the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be supported:

If one of these distinct Persons is a Father, in the divine nature, and another a Son in the divine nature, there must be something in the divine nature which is the ground of the relation, and distinguishes the one from the other; and can be nothing else than generation, and which distinguishes the third Person from them both, as neither begetting nor begotten. From generation arises the relation, and from relation distinct personality. And as an ancient writer says, "unbegotten, begotten, and proceeding," are not names of essence, (and it may be added, nor of office,) but are modes of subsistence; and so distinguish persons.¹²⁸

In this crucial statement, Gill identified the Son's generation as that which grounds the relation between the Father and Son, thus also securing an eternal distinction between all three divine Persons. Gill again could not speak about the Son's generation—his distinctive relative property—without reference to his relation to the Father and Spirit. The Son's generation reveals his relation to the other Persons and also reveals his distinct personality.

This statement, however, was not enough. Gill explicitly stated the necessity of eternal generation when he wrote:

Upon the whole, it is easy to observe, that the distinction of the Persons in the Deity depends on the generation of the Son; take away that, which would destroy the relation between the first and second Persons, and the distinction drops; and that this

¹²⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142. Gill cited *An Exposition of the Faith*, a work that is not believed to be an authentic work of Justin Martyr. Notice that in the quote Gill did not name Justin, but rather referred to "an ancient writer." The passage he cited can be found here. Justin Martyr, *Του Ἐν Ἁγίοις Πατρὸς Ἡμῶν Ἰουστίνου, Φιλοσόφου Καὶ Μαρτύρου Ζωζόμενα: Sancti Patris Nostri Iustini Philosophi Et Martyris Opera: Item Athenagoræ Atheniensis, Theophili Antiocheni, Tatiani Assyrii, & Hermiae Philosophia Tractatus Aliquot, Quos Sequens Pagina Indicabit* (Paris: Claudius Sannius, 1636), 373. Godet points out that Gill knew *A Exposition of the Faith* may not be authentic. Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 140. Fisk pointed out the central role of eternal generation in establishing these personal distinctions. Daniel T. Fisk, "The Theology of Dr. Gill," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 14, no. 54 (1857): 354–55. Cf. Park, "Nature and Grace," 247–48. Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 242–44.

distinction is natural and necessary, or by necessity of nature, and not arbitrary, or of choice and will.¹²⁹

The Son's eternal generation, according to Gill, establishes and grounds the relation between the Father and Son *in the divine nature*. This relation is necessary to distinguish the Son from the Spirit, and so generation distinguishes not only the Father and Son, but the Father, Son, and Spirit. In Gill's mind, without the Son's generation there is nothing on which to base the personal distinctions within the Godhead. Furthermore, without eternal generation, there is no way of establishing distinctions that arise from God's own nature, that is, from a necessity of who he is rather than by an arbitrary act of will.

Gill thought that alternative explanations for the intra-Trinitarian distinctions offered by those who disowned Sabellianism and Socinianism failed to provide a rationale for these distinctions. One such explanation was offered by Herman Alexander Röell (1653–1718), who, according to Gill, argued that the Christ's Sonship was established on the basis of his divinity and mediatorial office. Gill quoted Röell, stating that "eternal generation intends nothing else than an eternal communion of the same nature and co-existence with the first person." Gill further quoted Röell, who wrote "that those names, Father and Son, chiefly signify a communion of the same nature, yet so as to respect and have a singular regard to the manner in which the sacred Trinity would manifest it, by the wonderful oeconomy of persons." Röell believed that the designation of Father and Son to each person was thus interchangeable, and also stated that "to beget in the Father, intends the same as to be begotten in the Son. That the word Father, in the first person, signifies the same as the word Son, in the second."¹³⁰ Gill, relying in part on Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722), argued that Röell's position was untenable.¹³¹ Those

¹²⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142.

¹³⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 138–39, 140–41 [146–47, 148–49]. Gill quoted part of the same section from Röell in *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142. See Gill's mention of Röell in his "A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ," in *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 6:218–19.

¹³¹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 139–42 [147–50].

who hold this view, Gill argued, “are not able to prove it, nor to point out that which distinguishes one [person] from another.” Even the divine names and order of persons cannot be explained, “for if they have their names and distinction from the economy of man’s salvation, and the part they take therein, these cannot be given them antecedent to the said economy; and yet they must exist, and be considered as existing previous to it.”¹³² In sum, although the divine persons existed prior to the economy, no explanation can be given from Röell’s position as to why “why the first person is called the Father, the second the Son, and the third the Spirit.”¹³³ This strange belief, Gill argued, was the result of theologians deviating from the pattern of sound words, an allusion to 2 Timothy 1:13: “To such straits are men reduced, when they leave the form of sound words, which is dangerous, and generally leads into one error or another.”¹³⁴ For Gill, to deviate from eternal generation was to deviate from the “form of sound words.”

The second Person’s distinct relative property—that he is begotten—not only distinguishes him from the Father and Spirit, but is also the ground for calling him the Son of God. Gill believed this assertion had ample biblical warrant.¹³⁵ The second Person’s Sonship was attested to by all three divine Persons, by the Father at his baptism and transfiguration (Matt 3:17; 17:5), by the Son’s own testimony about himself which he proved through miraculous works (John 29:7; 5:17, 18; 10:30; Mark 14:61, 62; John 8:13–18), and by the Spirit, whose witness confirms that the Son’s testimony about himself “is good and valid; because it is not alone, but is in conjunction with the

¹³² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142–43.

¹³³ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 142 [150].

¹³⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143.

¹³⁵ Gill provided nearly identical proof-texts in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (see pp. 120–24) as the *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (see p. 143). Gill concisely explained the texts in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, whereas he merely listed the proofs and Scripture references in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*.

testimony of the Father, and also of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 3:16, 17).¹³⁶ Not only has God himself revealed the second Person as the Son, his Sonship has been attested to by good men (John 1:6, 7, 33, 34, 49; Matt 16:15, 16; John 6:67; 11:27; Acts 8:37) and bad men (Matt 27:54), as well as angels (Luke 1:31, 32, 35; Heb 1:6), demons (Matt 8:28, 29; Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41), and even Satan himself (Luke 4:3, 9).¹³⁷

Not only was the second person’s Sonship exegetically warranted, Gill asserted that it is of paramount importance for Christian belief: “The Sonship of Christ is an article of the greatest importance in the Christian religion.” In addition to grounding distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity, Christ’s Sonship is connected to baptism—both Christ’s baptism and that of all Christians who receive the ordinance in his name. In what is considered a disputed New Testament text, Gill cited Acts 8:37 as proof that the Ethiopian Eunuch’s first confession was “that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Lastly, it was “the sum and substance of the ministry of the apostle Paul” (Acts 9:20; 2 Cor 1:19). For these reasons, Christ’s Sonship is of utmost importance.¹³⁸

Gill went even further, contending that Christ’s Sonship is the indispensable doctrine for upholding the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as all other significant doctrines, and that it distinguishes Christianity from other religions:

it is the distinguishing criterion of the christian religion, and what gives it the preference to all others, and upon which all the important doctrines depend; even upon the Sonship of Christ as a divine person; and as by generation, even eternal generation. Without this the doctrine of the Trinity can never be supported.”¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Gill also believed the Spirit’s testimony of the second Person’s Sonship can be evinced at Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Spirit empowered the Apostles who attested to Christ’s Sonship through “signs and wonders” (Heb 2:4). Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 120–22. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143.

¹³⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 123–24. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143.

¹³⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 315–16. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143–44.

¹³⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 144.

The truth of this statement, Gill believed, was proven by the fact that its enemies worked so arduously to defeat it. Gill described Socinians attacks thus:

[T]hey have always set themselves against it with all their might and main; well knowing, that if they can demolish this, it is all over with the doctrine of the Trinity; for without this, the distinction of Persons in the Trinity can never be maintained; and, indeed, without this, there is none at all; take away this, and all distinction ceases.¹⁴⁰

The indispensability of eternal generation explains Gill’s astonishment about Thomas Ridgley (1667–1734), who held to the doctrine of the Trinity without eternal generation. It also explains why, as documented earlier in this dissertation, Gill wrote his *A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ* and made changes to his church confession. Ridgley, after surveying a number of texts that theologians commonly used to support the doctrine of eternal generation, claimed that they more accurately “respect him as God-man, Mediator.”¹⁴¹ Ridgley did not believe that this understanding of the second person removed any arguments for his deity: “This account of Christ’s sonship does not take away any argument, by which we prove his deity; for when we consider him as Mediator, we always suppose him to be both God and man.” Nor also did Ridgley believe that his mediatorial view took “away any argument to prove his distinct personality from the Father and Holy Ghost.” According to Ridgley, “because neither the Father, nor the Holy Ghost, can be said to be Mediators, it implies, that his personality is distinct from

¹⁴⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 144.

¹⁴¹ After Ridgley surveyed interpretations of Psalm 2:7, Proverbs 8:22, 23, 25, Micah 5:2, Hebrews 1:3, John 5:26, 1:14, 18, Matthew 16:16, Romans 8:32, and Matthew 3:17 that connect Sonship language with eternal generation, he posited the following: “But so far as I have any light; either from the context of the respective scriptures, or the analogy of faith, I cannot but conclude that these, and all others of the like nature, that are brought to prove the eternal generation, or sonship of Christ, respect him as God-man, Mediator.” Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrine of the Christian Religion are Explained and Defended. Being the Substance of Several Lectures on The Assembly’s Larger Catechism* (London, 1731), 1:125. Gill rightly identified Ridgley’s view as “Socinian” only so far as Ridgley based his conception of Christ’s Sonship on his mediatorial office. Gill wrote that Ridgley “strongly asserts, and contends for the doctrine of a Trinity of divine distinct persons in the Godhead, and yet strangely adopts the Socinian notion of Sonship by office, and makes the eternal Sonship of Christ to be what he calls his mediatorial Sonship.” Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 6:219. Ridgley addressed this similarity and distinguished his view from Socinianism by affirming that the Son is a divine, not merely human person. Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:128.

theirs.”¹⁴² Gill strongly objected on both accounts by asserting that “without his eternal generation no proof can be made of his being a distinct divine Person *in the Godhead*, and so not of his Deity.” In Gill’s mind, the doctrine of the Trinity was dependent upon the doctrine of the Son’s eternal generation.¹⁴³ He understood eternal generation as the Son’s distinct mode of subsistence and personal relation that both distinguished him from the other Persons—by a real, modal, and personal distinction—and also revealed his distinct personality *as a divine person*. Thus, it was only through eternal generation that the Son’s deity and distinct personality could be established and the doctrine of the Trinity maintained.

Establishing Eternal Generation

The remainder of this chapter follows Gill’s articulation of eternal generation as he presented it in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. His general outline was as follows: he defined the doctrine of eternal generation, defended it against its detractors, and then demonstrated its biblical warrant. Gill concluded his treatment of the Son’s relative property with a brief summary, of which this dissertation will take note. While following the outline of the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, I will draw from Gill’s other writings as needed to further explain his doctrine of eternal generation.

Defining Eternal Generation

Gill’s preliminary explanation of eternal generation treated two issues. The first issue concerned the sense in which the Son should be conceived to be begotten in *eternity*. The second issue concerned the nature of the Son’s *generation*. In other words, Gill sought to give an answer for how the Son could be understood as begotten but not made.

¹⁴² Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:127.

¹⁴³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 144, emphasis original.

Eternally generated? Gill sought to defend both aspects of the term, *eternal generation*, used to denote the Son’s distinct relative property, as Gill believed that it was biblically derived. First, with respect to the Son’s *generation*, he reasoned that “since one divine Person is said to *beget*, Psalm ii.7. and therefore must be a Father; and another divine Person is said to be *begotten*, John i. 14, 18. and elsewhere, and therefore must be a Son.” Furthermore, if the Son is begotten, he must also be generated, since the terms mean the same thing. Second, this generation of the Son may be called *eternal* because both the Father and Son are eternal: “if [generation is] used of the divine persons as in the divine nature, as if of the Father in the divine nature, then of the Son in the divine nature; and there being nothing in the divine nature but what is eternal, then this generation must be *eternal generation*.” Since there are no persons, attributes, or decrees in God that are not eternal, Gill rhetorically asked why the Son would not be eternal also? Here Gill drew a connection between the Son as the Word and Wisdom of God with “the eternal birth of the eternal mind” from Zephaniah 2:2. Drawing also on Proverbs 8:24, 25, Gill further identified the Son with God’s eternal Wisdom that was “brought forth” (הוֹלִלְתִּי), a word that he believed was “expressive of generation,” and was, at least “in some ancient versions, rendered *begotten*.” Likewise, in Proverbs 8:30, Gill mentioned that אִמּוֹ “is in some later versions rendered *carried in the bosom*, as a son in the bosom of the father; all which is spoken of as done in eternity.” These proofs, in addition to the fact that no one can establish a time during which the Son was not begotten from the Father, led Gill to conclude, “therefore he must be eternally begotten of him, or in other words, be the Son of the Father by eternal generation.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 144–45, emphasis original. The Son as the Word and Wisdom of God in Gill’s theology is further explained in chapter 5.

Gill anticipated an objection to his articulation of eternal generation, namely, that it is “a contradiction in terms.”¹⁴⁵ In responding to this criticism, Gill attempted to relieve his readers of this “seeming contradiction” and expressed an important component of his doctrine of eternal generation by making a distinction between a “priority of order and a priority of time.” Key to this distinction for Gill was the acknowledgement that God is infinite and eternal. For Gill, a priority of order may be attributed to God because he is eternal, but not so to finite creatures. Taking the divine decree of election as an example, Gill explained that God may still be “conceived of as previous to his act of choosing in priority of order, though not in priority of time, which cannot be admitted in eternity.” With respect to eternal generation, then, the Father may be thought of prior to the Son in terms of a priority of order, but not in terms of time, since both persons are eternal:

So the Father generating the Son, may be considered in priority of order previous to the Son generated by him, though not in priority of time, of which there can be none in eternity; considering therefore the Son’s generation of the Father from eternity, in a priority of order, though there can be none of time, it will not appear to be a contradiction in terms.¹⁴⁶

Here, Gill reasoned theologically about eternal generation from a commitment to God’s eternity. The important distinction between a priority of order and a priority of time affirmed the idea of divine ordering among the persons and helped Gill not only further explain the ineffable doctrine of eternal generation, but rebuff its critics. In Gill’s conception, the Son is generated from the Father in a way that reveals a divine *taxis* among the Persons of the Trinity. Gill’s affirmation of this distinction is an explicit step

¹⁴⁵ Eternal generation is called a contradiction in *The Racovian Catechism*, although stated in a way that no Reformed Orthodox thinker would own: “it must be observed, that this generation out of the Father’s essence involves a contradiction. For if Christ had been generated out of the essence of the Father, he must have been taken either a part of it, or the whole.” Thomas Rees, *The Racovian Catechism, with Notes and Illustrations, Translated from the Latin; to Which Is Prefixed a Sketch of the History of Unitarianism in Poland and the Adjacent Countries* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown American Theological Library Association, 1962), 70.

¹⁴⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145.

further than he was willing to go in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, where he was concerned to show the consubstantiality, independence, equality, and eternity of each of the persons. His reasoning about the order of the divine persons, however, did not take into account a priority of order between them. Gill's rationale, rather, served a pedagogical function and was justifiable based on some instances in which the persons are mentioned in a particular order:

Now when we call the Father the first person in the Trinity, we do not suppose that he is the first, in order of nature, or time, or causality; as if the Father was *fons Deitatis*, the fountain of the Deity; expressions which some good men have made use of with no ill design: But since an ill use has been made of them, by artful and designing men, 'tis time for us to lay them aside. As the Father is God of himself, so the Son is God of himself, and the Spirit is God of himself. They all three exist together, and necessarily exist, and subsist distinctly by themselves in one undivided nature. The one is not before the other, nor more excellent than the other. But since 'tis necessary, for our better apprehension of them, that there should be some order in the mention of them, it seems most proper to place the Father first, whence we call him the first person; and then the Son, and then the Holy Ghost; in which order we sometimes find them in scripture; Though, to let us see that there is a perfect equality between them, and no superiority or inferiority among them, this order is frequently inverted.¹⁴⁷

So, while Gill maintained a consubstantiality and distinctions between the persons, it was not until later that he expressed the idea of divine *taxis*.

Divine generation: rules for reasoning. As Gill continued to explicate the doctrine of eternal generation, he carefully laid down theological ground rules for understanding the nature of divine generation. When considering God, Gill taught, generation ought to be understood in a way that takes into account his divine, spiritual nature. Thus, when considering “the Divine Being,” Gill pointed out, generation “must be understood in a manner suitable to it, and not of carnal and corporal generation; no man in his senses can ever think that God generates as man does.” Instead, the Son’s

¹⁴⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 83–84. Gill’s development to include the idea of a priority of ordering can also be observed in the corresponding sections in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, in which Gill sought to prove that the Son’s role as mediator is grounded in his Sonship. On this point, Gill added argumentation utilizing the idea of a priority of order among the Persons in the later *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* that was not included in the earlier *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 142–43 [150–51]. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 152–53.

generation “must be understood of such generation as agrees with the nature of a spirit, and of an infinite uncreated spirit, as God is.”¹⁴⁸

In keeping with this theological ground rule, Gill found the analogy of the mind to be particularly helpful for understanding the nature of eternal generation.¹⁴⁹ Gill began his explanation by pointing out that people often speak about a thought being “conceived” in the mind, or of the mind’s “conception” of someone or something. In this way, the mind generates a thought. And this “thought is the *conception* and *birth* of the mind.” Gill correlated this idea with Platonic philosophy, which he characterized in this way: “thought is the birth of the mind; they call it the mind begotten by the mind, as it were another like itself; now as soon as the mind is, thought is, they commence together and they co-exist, and always will; and this the mind begets within itself; without any mutation or alteration in itself.” Gill immediately applied this analogy to the Father and the Son in eternal generation: “the mind to God who is *Νους*, the eternal mind, and thought, the birth of the mind, to Christ, the eternal *Λογος*, word and wisdom of God; who is in some sort represented by *λογος ἐνδιαθετος*, the internal mental word.” Gill further explained how this analogy concords with God’s spiritual nature and is fitting for eternal generation when he wrote the following:

¹⁴⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145. This hermeneutic was not unique to Gill. Khaled Anatolios, for instance, observes this same reasoning in Athanasius. Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development of Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 113. Park contends that Gill, without using the exact terminology, employs the analogy of being (*analogia entis*) not only in his discussion of the attributes, but in the analogy of the mind. In his estimation, “there is no substantial difference between [Gill and Aquinas].” Specifically, Gill employs the *via causalitatis* (or *via affirmationis*) to illustrate the Son’s generation from the Father by virtue of the analogy of the mind and also utilizes the *via negationis* (or *remotionis*) when he excluded elements of human generation that did not suit the Son’s divine nature. Park, “Grace and Nature,” 169–71, 249–51. On the meaning and use of these terms among the Reformed orthodox, see Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 24–25, 391. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:63, 166–67, 217, 395. Park explained the use of this method more broadly among the Reformed, stating that “when Reformed theologians used this method to explain the eternal generation of the second divine person, it was used along with their obvious recognition of the limits of the analogical explanation (the analogy of being). When they denied the analogical explanation of the generation of the second divine person, it was an indication of its evident limitations which are caused by the boundaries of our reason and the ontological gap between the infinite and the finite.” Park, “Grace and Nature,” 249.

¹⁴⁹ Gill’s understanding of the Son as the eternal Word of God (cf. John 1:1) is the central topic of chapter 5 and will be introduced here but further developed in that chapter.

Now if our finite created spirits, or minds, are capable of generating thought, the internal word or speech, and that without any motion, change, or alteration, without any diminution and corruption, without division of their nature or multiplication of their essence; then in an infinitely more perfect manner can God, an infinite uncreated spirit, beget his Son, the eternal Word, wisdom, reason, and understanding, in his eternal mind, which he never was without nor was he before it.

Gill cited not only John 1:1, 14 for support of this idea, he also noted that it was consistent with the writings of Philo.¹⁵⁰ The analogy of the mind was thus for Gill a helpful, biblical analogy for understanding the nature of the Son's generation that accounted in some measure for God's spiritual nature.

According to Gill, analogies, or similitudes as he called them, were meant as aids for understanding the deep mysteries of God that provide consolation to the believer. There are both similarities and differences to which one must carefully attend. For instance, similitudes between the mind and divine generation include the Son's generation by nature that affirms consubstantiality, eternity, simplicity, immutability, as well as generation as an immanent and necessary act of God's being. Differences, or dissimilitudes, include the idea that "the Father begets a person existing by himself" rather than merely a faculty and that he begets eternally and not "in time."¹⁵¹

Gill conceded that the words "begetting" and "begotten" were also used of human generation, which was in some ways similar to divine generation. Given these similarities, however, Gill argued that it was all the more important to remove any ideas that undermine one's understanding of God's perfect, eternal, and spiritual nature: "[C]are must be taken to remove from our minds every thing carnal and impure; and what implies an imperfection; as division of nature, multiplication of essence, priority and posteriority, motion, mutation, alteration, corruption, diminution, cessation from operation, &c."¹⁵² To avoid this, one should not argue from the direction of human

¹⁵⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145–46.

¹⁵¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

¹⁵² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

generation to divine generation, importing characteristics of finite, fleshly humanity onto God. To do so, Gill believed, would be irrational and dangerous:

[T]o reason from the one to the other, as running parallel to each other, is unreasonable; to argue from human to divine generation; from that which is hyperphysical or supernatural; from what is in finite nature, to that which is in a nature infinite, unbounded, and eternal, is very irrational; and to reason from the one to the other without limitation, restriction, care, and caution, is very unsafe and dangerous; since it may lead unawares into foolish and hurtful errors.¹⁵³

Gill was concerned to rightly understand eternal generation and was convinced that proper reasoning was necessary to establish orthodox conclusions. For him, a true Christian understanding of eternal generation must accord with God's spiritual nature. Analogies must be carefully explained in a manner that takes the similarities and differences between human and spiritual generation into account, and one must not take their ideas of divine generation from human generation without proper adjudication. In Gill's mind, those who did not follow these rules left themselves open to hazardous error.¹⁵⁴

Defending Eternal Generation

Although Gill carefully appropriated the analogy of the mind to the revelation of the Trinity in Scripture, attending to his theological rules for reasoning about divine generation, he was conscious that others did not. He identified three major objections to

¹⁵³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

¹⁵⁴ John Owen reasoned similarly, arguing that you cannot move logically from the finite to the infinite in order to make sense of the Trinity: "The very foundation of all their objections and cavils against this truth, is destructive of as fundamental principles of reason as are in the world. They are all, at best, reduced to this: It cannot be thus in things finite; the same being cannot in one respect be *one*, in another *three*, and the like: and therefore it is so in things finite. All these reasonings are built upon this supposition, that that which is *finite* can perfectly comprehend that which is *infinite*,—an assertion absurd, foolish, and contradictory unto itself. Again; it is the highest reason in things of pure revelation to captivate our understandings to the authority of the Revealer; which is here rejected. So that by a loud, specious, pretence of reason, these men, by a little captious sophistry, endeavour not only to countenance their unbelief, but to evert the greatest principles of reason itself." John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of The Doctrine of the Trinity: As Also of The Person and Satisfaction of Christ: Accommodated to the Capacity and Use of Such as May Be in Danger to be Seduced; and the Establishment of the Truth*, in *WJO*, 2:412. So also Turretin before him: "Whatever may be the analogy between natural and human generations, and the supernatural and divine, still the latter is not to be measured by the former or to be tried by them because they greatly differ (whether we consider the principle, the mode or the end)." Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:292–93 [3.29.IV].

eternal generation and refuted them one by one. Gill knew that defining eternal generation was not sufficient given his anti-Trinitarian context. He thus sought to deconstruct what he perceived as the most powerful arguments against it.¹⁵⁵

Defending the Son’s eternity. The first objection Gill refuted concerned the Son’s eternity. What Gill called “the old stale objection of the Arians, and of Arius himself” was the idea that “he that generates must be before him that is generated.” This objection implied, then, that the Son is not eternal, because the Father—his begetter—exists prior to him. Gill responded with another rule for understanding the Son’s generation that upheld his eternity: “correlates mutually put or suppose each other.” Gill applied this rule to fathers and sons, arguing that you cannot have the one without the other since “a father supposes a son, and a son supposes a father.” The existence of one, then, proved the simultaneous existence of the other. In his words, “There is no priority nor posteriority, no *before* nor *after* in these relations . . . if there is an eternal Father, there must be an eternal Son, and therefore must be co-eternal; there cannot be a Father without a Son, that would be an absurdity, and therefore not before him.”¹⁵⁶

Gill’s response to this objection provided a rationale for the concurrent relation between the father and son, although it did not directly address the idea that “he that is a father, though not as a father, must exist before him who is his son.” Gill answered this objection by appealing to contemporary works of natural philosophy, by which he suggested that this objection was based upon “a false notion of animal generation.” Gill corrected this false notion by stating that human generation is not a creation in the way that God created *ex nihilo*. Rather, Gill suggested,

¹⁵⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146. Muller has explained that Gill “had mastered . . . the work of his doctrinal adversaries,” such as Socinus. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition,” 54.

¹⁵⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 147.

According to the later discoveries in natural philosophy respecting generation, it appears that every man is born of an animalcule; that generation, so called, is no other than a motion of the animalcule into a more convenient place for nourishment and growth. All generation, say our modern philosophers, is with us nothing, so far as we can find, but *nutrition*, or *augmentation* of parts: they conclude, that the *animalcula* of every tribe of creatures, were originally formed by the almighty Parent, to be the seed of all future generations of animals; and that it seems most probable, that the *semina*, or *stamina*, as of all plants, so of animals that have been or ever shall be in the world have been formed *ab origine mundi*, by the almighty Creator, within the first of each respective kind; and that these are no other than the entire bodies themselves *in parvo*; and contain every one of the same parts and members, with the complete bodies themselves, when grown to maturity.¹⁵⁷

Gill was convinced that this idea of generation, which postulated that one’s posterity is “seminally” present in their parents, was consistent with the biblical notion “that Levi, the great-grandson of Abraham was in his loins, that is, seminally in him, before his father Jacob was born.” It was also consistent, Gill thought, with the idea that all of mankind was both seminally and “representatively” in Adam (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22). Gill concluded, then, that generation did not necessarily involve priority or posteriority because a son is present with his parents *in parvo* prior to birth. In the end, however, Gill could not appeal to this philosophy with certainty, despite the fact that he was able to harmonize it with some scriptural texts. His purpose, rather, was to blunt the force of the objections made against the Son’s eternity.¹⁵⁸

This rare citation of natural philosophy to defend eternal generation should be understood in the anti-Trinitarian context in which Gill ministered. As this dissertation has so far demonstrated, Gill’s decidedly based his doctrine on the biblical text and theological reasoning. On an issue as central and contentious as eternal generation was at the time, Gill understandably drew from some sources—whether from philosophy or the natural world—that harmonized with the biblical text to provide a multifaceted defense of eternal generation.

¹⁵⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 147.

¹⁵⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 147–48.

Defending the Son's aseity. The second critique of eternal generation to which Gill attended was the assertion that eternal generation undermined the Son's independence. Gill's first response again leaned up his understanding of animal generation, gleaned from natural philosophy. He argued, according to this understanding of generation, that a son is not dependent on a father for his existence because God is the only "efficient Cause and Author of his Being." A father is "at most, only any instrument of removing the animalcule, created of God, into a more convenient situation for nourishment and growth; in order, at a proper time, to come forth into the world." Furthermore, a father has no control over the gestation of his son in a way that reveals dependence. It is only after birth, Gill concedes, that a son is dependent on the father for care, provision, assistance, and protection. But, he contended, this aspect of human weakness cannot be attributed to God's nature. And to further prove his case, Gill pointed out, in a rhetorical question, that parents are often dependent upon their children for care.¹⁵⁹

Gill's main defense, however, came from his understanding of the Son's aseity.¹⁶⁰ For Gill, each of the divine persons is "God of himself." That is, each person is independent *as God*: "Christ, as all sound divines hold is *αὐτοθεος*, God of himself, and independent of any other, though he is the Son of the Father." Thus, his divine nature is not dependent upon God the Father. Furthermore, Gill reflected on the intra-Trinitarian relations to reason that the distinct personalities of the Trinitarian persons are mutually dependent:

[A]nd as the distinct personality of the Son of God arises from his relation to his Father as such, so the distinct personality of the Father arises from his relation to his Son as such; hence the distinct personality of the one, is no more dependent, than the distinct personality of the other; and both arise from their mutual relation to each

¹⁵⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148.

¹⁶⁰ Gill's doctrine of the Son's aseity as it relates to eternal generation is the subject of the next chapter. It is introduced here and further developed there.

other; and both arise and commence together, and not one before the other; and both are founded in eternal generation.¹⁶¹

Thus, with respect to both the divine nature and the Trinitarian persons, Gill argues for independence and mutual dependence, respectively. He also grounds their mutual relation, and their distinct personalities revealed by it, in eternal generation. Not only does this statement demonstrate Gill's understanding of the Son's aseity as a divine person, it further reveals the centrality of eternal generation for Gill's doctrine of the Trinity.

Defending the Son's equality. The main objection that Gill sought to answer against the Son's equality was that his Sonship made him subordinate to the Father. To do so, Gill had to maintain a careful two-natures Christology that distinguished between the Son's eternal being and economic role as Mediator. The Son, Gill believed, could be distinguished as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. As the Son of God, he is understood in his divine nature—in which he is coessential and coequal to God the Father. Gill was clear to stave off the application of human father-son relationships that imply subordination to the divine nature: “whatever inequality sonship may imply among men, it implies no such thing in the divine nature, among the divine persons; who in it subsist in perfect equality with one another.” As the Son of Man, he is understood as a human in the office of Mediator. Gill acknowledged that the Son in his role as Mediator became a man, “is a Servant,” and “is subordinate and subject to the Father; but not as he is the Son of God.”¹⁶²

Gill's distinction of the Son as both the Son of God and Son of Man entailed a “twofold Sonship.” This twofold Sonship, taking into account the two natures of Christ, provided Gill the hermeneutical tools to engage subordinationist readings of 1

¹⁶¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148. Cf. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30–31. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 148–49.

¹⁶² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148–49.

Corinthians 15:24, 28, “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father—and when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him; and put all things under him: that God may be all in all.”¹⁶³ Gill argued that the context clearly indicates that the Son’s mediatorial office is in view and that this text references his second coming when he “will deliver up the mediatorial kingdom” to the Father. At that time, the Son will divest himself of his mediatorial role and “shall become subject to him that put all things under him.” After this, Gill explains, the economic distinctions between the Persons will give way to their essential distinctions wherein they all receive glory as divine Persons: “and the God, Father, Son, and Spirit, will be all in all; and there will be no more distinction of offices among them; only the natural and essential distinctions of the divine Persons will always continue.”¹⁶⁴

Gill’s arguments for the Son’s equality with the Father as a divine Person required an understanding of his Sonship in two senses, which required careful adherence to the Chalcedonian two-natures Christology. This theological hermeneutic guided Gill as he exegeted difficult texts, such as 1 Corinthians 15: 24, 28, wherein he was able to give a reason for both the Son’s subordination as Mediator and glory as God.

Defending Christ’s Sonship. As Gill continued to explicate his doctrine of eternal generation, he defended the nature of Christ’s Sonship against rival proposals. This method of argumentation was similar to other Protestant Scholastics who refuted Socinian reinterpretations of Christ’s Sonship and put forth eternal generation as its only “true basis.”¹⁶⁵ As Owen stated the issue in his response to Biddle’s *Twofold Catechism*,

¹⁶³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148–49, Gill’s translation.

¹⁶⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148–49.

¹⁶⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Theology*, 149. Owen identified and rebutted John Biddle’s key arguments locating Christ’s Sonship in economic terms and provided his defense of eternal generation. Owen’s argumentation is similar at multiple points to Gill: John Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*;

“The Question that lies before us is, ‘Doth the Scripture account Christ to be the Son of God because he was eternally begotten out of the divine essence, or for other reasons agreeing to him only as a man?’”¹⁶⁶ Gill, like Owen, answered this question by affirming that eternal generation is the basis of Christ’s Sonship.

In his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill reused much of his material from *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, specifically material from chapter seven, “Concerning the Sonship of Christ.” This section, and the corresponding chapter from which it was derived, took specific aim at Socinian arguments, relying on Abraham Calovius’ (1612–1686) *Socinismus Profligatus*, in which he collected thirteen Socinians reasons for Christ’s Sonship.¹⁶⁷ Gill did not think all thirteen were worth a response, so he limited his engagement to what he considered the Socinians’ six key reasons for affirming Christ’s Sonship.¹⁶⁸ First, the Socinians argued that Christ’s Sonship is grounded in “the great love of God to him.” To this, Gill replied that they make “*beloved* and *begotten* to be synonymous,” and that “he is not his Son because he loves him; but he loves him because he is his Son.” Second, the Son’s “likeness” to the Father is the ground of his Sonship. Gill agreed that the Son is like the Father because they share their divinity, but again reversed the Socinian logic: “yet the reason why Christ is called the Son of God, is not because he is like him, but he is like him because he is his Son.” Third, Christ is Son by adoption. Gill reflected on John 3:16 and argued that it is “inconsistent” for the Son to be

or, *The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, in *WJO*, 12:177–201. Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:551–54 [1.2.26.XVI]. Gill’s similarity to other Reformed arguments is seen in Muller’s discussion: Muller, *PRRD*, 4:275–78. Turretin addressed Socinian reasons for Christ’s Sonship by making issue of consubstantiality central, which he wrote was “the real hinge of the question.” Thus, he established the basis of Christ’s Sonship in eternal generation by proving his deity and eternal generation. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 4:294–301 [3.29.VIII–XXVIII.]

¹⁶⁶ Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, in *WJO*, 12:177.

¹⁶⁷ Abraham Calovius, *Socinismus Profligatus, hoc est, Errorum Socinianorum Luculenta Confutatio, è S. Literis, Propriisq; Ipsorum Testimoniis, Per Universam Theologiam, Trecentis Quæstionibus, Methodo Concinna, Brevitate Nervosa, Ita Instituta*. (Wittenberg: Joh. Borckard, 1668).

¹⁶⁸ The list of six Socinian arguments is the same in both works. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 149. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 124.

called “begotten” in Scripture, and yet be adopted. Furthermore, Christ is called God’s “only” begotten Son. If he were adopted, Gill asserted, he would be one of the many adopted sons referenced in Scripture.¹⁶⁹

Gill handled these first three arguments for Sonship in quick order, but gave much more consideration to three other arguments that “have the most countenance from scripture.”¹⁷⁰ The three Socinian explanations of Sonship that Gill thought deserved greater attention concerned Christ’s incarnation, resurrection, and mediatorial office.¹⁷¹ With respect to the Son’s incarnation, Gill made six counter points. Among those points, Gill argued that the “incarnation of Christ is not the reason of his being the Son of God, but the manifestation of it.”¹⁷² This point was built on Gill’s basic belief in the Son’s existence prior to his incarnation, which was vigorously opposed by Socinians.¹⁷³ Gill believed that the Son was seen in the Old Testament (Dan 3:35), was spoken of by David (e.g., Pss 2:7, 12; 89:26, 27), and existed prior to the universe he created (Heb 1:2; Ps 72:17). This line of argumentation was similar to that of John Owen, who, in refuting John Biddle, sought to prove that Christ was considered the Son prior to his work in the

¹⁶⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 149–50. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 124–26.

¹⁷⁰ Gill provided a similar explanation in both works for spending more time on the latter three reasons Socinians provided for Christ’s Sonship. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 150. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 126.

¹⁷¹ Muller highlights how the Reformed orthodox recognized three texts from which Socinians attacked Christ’s eternal Sonship, Luke 1:31–35, John 10:36, and Psalm 2:7 as quoted in Acts 13:32–33, which correspond to Christ’s incarnation, mediation, and resurrection, respectively. Gill also worked through these texts and responded to their corresponding Socinian arguments. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:277–78.

¹⁷² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 151.

¹⁷³ For example, the opening teaching about Christ in *The Racovian Catechism* stated “that by nature he was truly a man; a mortal man while he lives on earth, but now immortal.” The *Catechism* accordingly taught that Christ did not dwell in two natures, thus further denying his pre-existent, divine nature: “But do you not acknowledge in Christ a divine, as well as a human nature or substance? If by the terms divine nature or substance I am to understand the very essence of God, I do not acknowledge such a divine nature in Christ; for this were repugnant both to right reason and to the Holy Scriptures.” To make the matter even more clear, the *Catechism* provided an explanation for texts commonly used to assert the Son’s eternal existence prior to discussing the Son’s eternal generation. Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 51, 55, 62–69.

economy of salvation.¹⁷⁴ Owen, like Gill, thus refuted the idea that Christ was called Son merely because of his economic work.¹⁷⁵ What is more, Gill contented, Christ's Sonship is contrasted with the sonship of angels in Hebrews 1:5, showing that if his Sonship "must be in a higher class" than the angels, then his taking on a human nature would certainly not be the basis of his Sonship.¹⁷⁶

Gill next sought to refute the idea that Christ is named the Son because of his resurrection. Gill began by highlighting the inconsistency among Socinians, some of whom believed that Sonship was based on his incarnation, which would then be prior to his resurrection. This idea, Gill argued, created an absurdity leading to the idea that the Son "must beget himself," since he predicted and raised himself from the dead (John 2:19; 10:18). It also made his Sonship "metaphorical and figurative," whereas Scripture reveals that Christ is God's "own Son, his proper Son, the Son of himself; and God his own proper Father" (Rom 8:3, 32; John 5:18). Gill thought that basing Christ's Sonship on the resurrection was antithetical to Scripture's witness to him as the "only begotten." If resurrection is the basis for Sonship, then all those who were raised with Christ at his resurrection, and will be in the future—even evil men—are sons for the same reason. Contrary to this notion, Gill argued that Christ was the eternal Son of God prior to his resurrection, as are his elect children who will be raised at the resurrection. The resurrection, then, served "only a manifestation of his Sonship." Reflecting on Romans 1:4, Psalm 2:7, and Acts 13:25, Gill explained the relationship between Christ's Sonship and his resurrection in this way: "not that he was then begotten as the Son of God, for he

¹⁷⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 151.

¹⁷⁵ Owen pointedly stated his disagreement with Biddle: "If Jesus Christ be called the 'Son of God' antecedently to his *incarnation, mission, resurrection, and exaltation*, then there is a reason and a cause of that appellation before and above all these considerations, and it cannot be on any of these accounts that he is called the 'Son of God.'" Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, in *WJO*, 12:177–84, emphasis original.

¹⁷⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 150–51. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 126–37.

was so before, as has been proved; but he was then manifested to be the only begotten Son of God.”¹⁷⁷

Having refuted the Socinian ideas that Christ’s Sonship was based on his incarnation and resurrection, Gill gave the most attention to the argument that Christ’s Sonship is based on his office of Mediator. In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill acknowledged “That many, or most of the scriptures which speak of him as the Son of God, do at the same time hint some things which relate to him as Mediator,” but contended that the important question was whether or not “his Mediatorship is the foundation of his Sonship.” That proposition, he asserted, “is a question that ought to be proved, and not begged.”¹⁷⁸ Gill addressed this proposition by identifying a key Socinian argument—that Christ “is called the Son of God, because he was sanctified, or set apart to his office, as such; and was sent into the world to do it, and has executed it, and is now exalted in heaven.” The key text for this teaching, Gill noted, was John 10:36, “Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, thou blasphemest because I

¹⁷⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 151–52. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 137–39. Gill’s reasoning through these texts was remarkably consistent. The outline of argumentation in his exposition of Acts 13:33 very closely resembles that in the above-referenced sections of his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* and *The Doctrine of the Trinity*: “The words are to be understood of the eternal filiation of Christ, and are produced, to set forth the greatness and dignity of his person; whom God had raised and sent forth in human nature, to be the Saviour and Redeemer of his people: though should they be applied to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it will no ways prejudice the doctrine of Christ’s proper and natural sonship, as being the only-begotten of the father; since the resurrection of Christ is not the cause of his sonship, or the reason why he is called the son of God, but a manifestation of it; Christ was the son of God, before his resurrection from the dead; he was declared to be so by a voice from heaven, was believed on by his disciples as such, and confessed by others, both men and devils: besides, if his resurrection was the cause of his sonship, he must beget himself, which is absurd, for he was himself concerned in his resurrection from the dead; moreover, his sonship would not be proper, but figurative and metaphorical, whereas he is God’s own, or proper son; besides, on this account he could not be called God’s only-begotten son, because there are others that have been, and millions that will be raised from the dead besides him: but the reason why these words are applied to the resurrection of Christ, allowing them to be so, is not because he was then begotten as the son of God, but because he was then manifested to be the eternally-begotten son of God; things are said to be, when they are only manifested to be; so Christ is said to be that day begotten, because he was declared to be the son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead, Rom. i. 4. Hence these words are applicable to any time or thing wherein Christ is manifested to be the only-begotten son of God, and accordingly are applied to different times and things; see Heb. i. 3, 4, 5. and v. 5.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:268, emphasis Gill’s. For similar argumentation, see Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicæ*, in *WJO*, 12:191–94. Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:542–43 [1.2.26.II].

¹⁷⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 140. Gill *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 152.

said I am the Son of God?” Gill agreed that this text taught that the Son of God was sent and sanctified, but not that these are the basis of his Sonship. Even in this passage, Gill argued, Jesus “asserted his equality with God,” which was the reason he was accused of blasphemy. According to Gill, Jesus made his point by arguing from the lesser to the greater:

[I]f magistrates, without blasphemy, might be called gods, and children of the most High, much more might he be called the Son of God, who was in such an eminent manner sanctified, and sent into the world by the Father; but then he let not the stress of the proof of his Deity and Sonship rest here; but proceeds to prove the same by his doing the same works his Father did; to which he appeals.¹⁷⁹

Gill provided other refutations to the idea that Sonship is based on Mediation. He again noted that Sonship based on Mediation would be Sonship that is both “improper or metaphorical,” a point which he had already rebutted. Gill continually sought to turn the Socinian logic on its head by stating the exact opposite of their claim that Sonship is grounded in Mediation: “it is Sonship that is the ground of his mediatorship; for antecedent to his investiture with his office, he must be considered as previously existing under some character or another, and which appears to be his relation to God as his Son.” Gill argued his case by proffering texts he believed spoke of Christ as being the Son prior to his Mediatorial office as king, priest, and prophet (Heb 1:8; 7:28; John 1:18). By again using the language of a priority of order, Gill delicately described the sense in Christ should be considered as Son prior to being considered Mediator:

when, I say, Christ, as the Son of God, must be considered previous to his being the Mediator; though he is both from eternity; it must be understood, not of priority of time, of which there is none in eternity; but of priority of order; for Christ must be considered as existing as a divine Person, under some character or relation, ere he can be considered as invested with an office; not in order of time, both being eternal; but in order of nature; even as the eternal God, must be considered as existing previous to any act of his; as of eternal election, not in priority of time, the

¹⁷⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 152, Gill’s translation. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 140–42. Owen also identified this text and reasoning as a common basis for Christ’s Sonship: Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, in *WJO*, 12:182–83. Owen also identified this text as a common reason why Socinians call Christ the “Son of God” and “God” (12:182).

eternal acts of God being as early as himself; but in priority of order as one thing must be conceived of and considered by our finite minds, before another.¹⁸⁰

Gill went on to argue that as Scripture speaks of the Son prior to his Mediatorial office, it also “frequently distinguished him as a Son, from the consideration of him in his mediatorial office” (Acts 8:37; 9:20; 1 John 4:14, 15; 5:5), in which he is also called a Servant (Isa 42:1; 49:3; 53:11; Phil 2:7, 8) and contrasted with other servants as a Son (John 8:35; Heb 3:5, 6). Not minimizing the Son’s work as Mediator, he argued that his Sonship provides the basis for his effective and awe-inspiring mediation (Heb 4:14; 5:8; 1 John 1:7). In the case of 1 John 1:7, Gill reasoned that “the Sonship of Christ is represented as putting a virtue and efficacy into what he has done as Mediator, and therefore must be distinct from his office as such.” To further this point, Gill contended that Christ’s Sonship by divine nature is used in Scripture to “express and enhance the love of God, in the gift of him to the sons of men. . . which would not be so strongly expressed. . . if Christ, in such a gift, is considered not as a Son by nature, but as a Servant, and in an office-capacity.”¹⁸¹

In the end, Gill did not think the Socinians could give a reasonable, biblical defense of why Christ should be called the Son on account of his mediatorial office. To him, there must be some reason inherent in the office of mediator to provide such a rationale:

If Christ is the Son of God, and may be called his begotten Son, by virtue of his constitution as Mediator, it should be shown, that there is something in that constitution which is analogous, or answers to generation and Sonship, and lays a sufficient ground and foundation for Christ being called God’s own Son, his proper and only begotten Son; what is there in the first Person’s appointing and constituting the second to be a Mediator, that gives him the name of a Father? and what is that in

¹⁸⁰ This explanation of a priority of order was not included in the corresponding section of *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 152–53. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 142–43.

¹⁸¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 153–54. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 143–138 [143–146].

the constitution of the second Person in such an office, that gives him the name of the Son, of the only begotten Son?¹⁸²

Since Gill thought no biblical rationale could be given for Christ's Sonship from a Socinian position, he maintained that the basis for Christ's eternal Sonship is his eternal generation. And he was confident this could be demonstrated from the Scriptures.

Demonstrating Eternal Generation

The next movement in Gill's twenty-eighth chapter of *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* comprises his attempt to demonstrate the biblical warrant for eternal generation as the sole ground of Christ's Sonship. His method in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* was to first clear the floor of all rival views before giving the reader the true reason for it. In Gill's words,

Having removed the chief and principle of the false causes, and reasons of Christ's Sonship, assigned by the Socinians; I shall proceed to establish the true cause of it; and settle it on its true basis; by assigning it to its proper and sole cause, his eternal generation by the Father; which I shall attempt to do by various passages of scripture.¹⁸³

One passage, however, Gill did not proffer as evidence of eternal generation was Isaiah 53:8, "Who shall declare his generation." While Gill acknowledged that it was used by "the ancient writers" to prove either his human or divine generation, he interpreted it differently. The verse did not refer to his human birth, Gill reasoned, because Isaiah declared it (Isa 7:14; 4:6); nor did it denote the Son's eternal generation, "which is declared both by the Father and the Son." Instead, Gill proposed two options. The first option put forth Christ's spiritual descendants (cf. 53:10) as the reference, although their number is not to be known. Gill, however, preferred the second option—that the verse denotes "the wickedness of that age and generation in which Christ should

¹⁸² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 154. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 142 [150].

¹⁸³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 154.

appear in the flesh.”¹⁸⁴ Gill then moved to discuss those texts that he thought proved the Son’s eternal generation from the Father.

Micah 5:2. Gill’s biblical and theological demonstration of eternal generation relied primarily on his exegesis and theological reasoning from three texts, Micah 5:2, Psalm 2:7, and Proverbs 8:22.¹⁸⁵ These texts, in addition to Psalm 110:3, were put forward in *The Racovian Catechism* as the main texts used to prove the Son’s eternal generation.¹⁸⁶ In his earlier exegesis, Gill did not regard Micah 5:2 was a proof of the Son’s eternal generation. Since the text refers to plural “goings,” Gill did not think generation was in view, but rather his involvement “in the everlasting counsel and covenant of peace, to secure the salvation of his people.” While the text did not prove eternal generation, it did demonstrate the Son’s eternity.¹⁸⁷

Gill eventually became open to the idea that Micah 5:2 reveals the Son’s eternal generation, as indicated in his *Exposition of the Prophets*, published in 1757–1758.¹⁸⁸ In this *Exposition*, Gill confronted the Socinian interpretation which proposed that the text refers to Christ’s lineage from David or Abraham since it was from long

¹⁸⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 154, Gill’s translation. Gill’s exegesis in *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* is nearly identical to what appears in his *Exposition* of Isaiah 53:8, although Gill insisted more clearly on the latter option in the *Exposition*. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 5:314. Gill’s consistency on this text is also evident in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, where he also did not think it spoke of the Son’s generation. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 148 [156]. Like Gill, Turretin thought Isaiah 53:8 did not refer primarily to eternal generation; he did, however, think it could be useful as a contrast to human generation: “The words of Isa. 53:8, although having another bearing, may be rightly used here—‘Who shall declare his generation?’ But only that it may be distinguished from human generation and be explained negatively rather than positively.” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:292 [3.29.III].

¹⁸⁵ These texts are also the three main texts used by Turretin from the Old Testament to prove eternal generation. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:294–98 [3.29.VIII–XIII]. Mastricht reflected on Psalm 2:7 as the basis for his chapter on “God the Son.” Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:539–66 [1.2.26].

¹⁸⁶ Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 69–70. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:284.

¹⁸⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 148 [156].

¹⁸⁸ John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (1838; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2006), 74.

before his incarnation. This interpretation of the passage was expressed as the meaning of this text in *The Racovian Catechism*:

The meaning of the passage then is, that Christ should deduce the illustrious origin of his birth from a very remote antiquity—that is, from the time when God, after rejecting Saul, established a king and a regal family over his people—which was done in David; who was of Bethlehem, and was also the author of the stock and family of Christ: or, indeed, from Abraham himself, who was the first father and progenitor of the race of Israel.¹⁸⁹

Gill did not think this idea was plausible, since the text speaks of Christ’s “goings forth” as “from everlasting.” Nor did he think these “goings forth” referred to prophecies or promises about him, these being “only foretold and spoken of” rather than actually existing. It further could not be a reference to the decree that Christ would come, because that could be said of anyone born in Bethlehem. Finally, Gill rejected the idea that this text referred to Christ’s appearances in the Old Testament “in a human form” because they cannot be described as eternal.¹⁹⁰

In place of these options, Gill suggested that Micah 5:2 referred to either the Son’s works of grace in the eternal covenant or to his eternal generation. According to how this text was “commonly interpreted,” it revealed that Christ “is the only-begotten of the Father, of the same nature with him, and a distinct person from him; the eternal Word that went forth from him, and was with him from eternity, and is truly God. The phrases are expressive of the eternity of his divine nature and person.” Thus, the text breaks up into two parts: “the former part of the text sets forth his human birth,” while the latter bespeaks “his divine generation.” Whereas Gill previously had difficulty applying the plural “goings forth” to the Son’s generation, he now said the plural number expressed the “excellency and ineffableness of it.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 70–71.

¹⁹⁰ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 6:574. Turretin also refuted the arguments appealing to David and the eternal decree. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:297 [3.29.XIII].

¹⁹¹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 6:574. Mastricht also refers to “two goings,” referring to his divine and human generation. Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:547

Gill reminded the readers of his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* that he did not think this text was a proof of eternal generation in his earlier *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, “though this has been, and still is, insisted on by great and good men as a proof of it.” He sympathetically noted that some thought it referred to the Son’s “mission in time,” or his “coming into the world” to take on a human nature. He again noted that the plural “goings forth” seem inconsistent with a single act of generation, and that generation “is an act of the Father,” whereas this text seems to be referring to “acts of the Son.” For these reasons, Gill suggested that it could, then, be a reference to the Son’s eternal work as Mediator. Since Gill had already proven that Christ should be considered Son prior to his work as Mediator, Gill could claim this text spoke to his eternal Sonship: “these words are a full proof of the eternal existence of Christ; or otherwise these things could not be predicated of him and his existence so early, under the relation and character of the Son of God, and that previous to his goings forth in a mediatorial way; as before proved.” Gill then asserted that eternal generation was the foundation of all the Son’s goings forth, appealing to the distinction between the Son’s human and divine birth, the idea of generation from natural philosophy, and the meaning of the Hebrew word *נשׂא*:

Yet, after all, I see not but that the divine generation of Christ may be included in those *goings forth*; and be the first and principal, and the foundation of the rest; since the contrast in the text is between the Deity and humanity of Christ; or, between his two births and sonships, divine and human; and the phrase of going forth, suits very well with the modern notion of generation, before observed; and the word *נשׂא* is frequently used of generation, Gen xlvi. 26. Isa xi.i. and xlviii. 1, 19. and, indeed, in the very text itself.¹⁹²

Gill thus admitted to having a change of mind from his earlier work on the Trinity and now considered Micah 5:2 as biblical proof of the Son’s eternal generation from the Father.

[1.2.26.VII]. Turretin thought this distinguished between his human birth and divine generation. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:297 [3.29.XIII].

¹⁹² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 154.

Psalm 2:7. Gill consistently interpreted Psalm 2:7 as a proof of eternal generation, making pertinent exegetical and theological observations in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, his *Exposition*, and the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. Gill attributed its authorship to David and interpreted it as a prophecy of Christ’s “person, office, and kingdom.”¹⁹³ In so doing, Gill believed the words of Psalm 2:7 were spoken by Christ. Gill explained that the first sentence of 2:7, “I will declare the decree,” referred to God’s plan of salvation. With care, he made sure to distance the declaration of God’s decree with the following statement about Christ’s eternal Sonship. Gill thought that the decree referred to what came before verse 7.¹⁹⁴ Gill’s exegesis ran counter to that of Ridgley, who connected the decree to the following statement of Sonship. For this reason, Ridgley denied that this text was proof of the Son’s generation or personality: “Far be it from us to suppose that the divine nature, or personality of the Son, was the result of an act of the divine will.” Ridgley considered the entire Psalm in terms of Christ’s mediation, using the quotations of the Psalm in Hebrews 1:5 and Acts 13:32–33 as confirmation.¹⁹⁵ On the contrary, Gill, having separated the decree from Christ’s Sonship—possibly to avoid Ridgley’s conclusions—argued that Christ’s Sonship “is the ground and foundation of the whole gospel-scheme,” i.e., God’s salvation work indicated by the decree. Gill quickly and concisely explained that this Sonship “depends not on any decree, counsel, or will of God, but is of nature,” thus contrasting the decree of God’s salvation-plan with the following declaration of Christ’s eternal generation.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:527–28.

¹⁹⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 154–55. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:530.

¹⁹⁵ Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:125–26.

¹⁹⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 154–55, Gill’s translation, emphasis original. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:530. Turretin likewise differentiated the decree from the Son’s generation: “This generation is not set forth as a part of this decree, but only as its foundation upon which the universal kingdom (granted to him) is built. For unless Christ had been the true and eternal Son of God, begotten by him from eternity, he never could have been appointed mediator and obtain a universal kingdom.” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:295 [3.29.IX].

Gill straightforwardly interpreted the remainder of verse 7 as an affirmation of Christ's eternal filiation, "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day Have I begotten thee."¹⁹⁷ As support for this reading, Gill argued that in the context of Psalm 2, invoking Christ's Sonship demonstrated the utter futility and sinfulness of any attempt to thwart God's kingdom. In a word, the Psalm reveals Christ's Sonship "to shew the greatness and excellency of the Person spoken of in the context; and so to aggravate the wickedness of his enemies; since the King they opposed, is no other than the natural and proper Son of God."¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Gill argued that the text was quoted for similar use in Hebrews 1:5 to reveal "the glory of his nature, the excellency of his person, and pre-eminence to angels."¹⁹⁹

In his *Exposition*, Gill explained the nature of Christ's Sonship in contrast to some of the Socinian interpretations outlined above. In familiar fashion he first stated what Christ's Sonship is not. Christ is not Son "by creation, as angels and men; nor by adoption, as saints; nor by office, as civil magistrates; nor on account of his incarnation or resurrection; nor because of the great love of God unto him." By contrast, "he is the true, proper, natural, and eternal Son of God." That is, he is Son by nature. The "foundation" of this assertion, Gill wrote, is found in the words, "this day have I begotten you."²⁰⁰ In what sense, then, is the Son begotten? Gill continued to narrow, in mostly negative terms, what was meant by this biblical affirmation:

[The] act of begetting refers not to the nature, not to the office, but the person of Christ; not to his nature, not to his divine nature, which is common with the Father

¹⁹⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 154, Gill's translation. Except for differing capitalization, the translation is the same in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity and Exposition*.

¹⁹⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 155. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 147 [155].

¹⁹⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 147 [155]. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 155.

²⁰⁰ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:531, Gill's translation. Owen used the quotation of Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:5 to contrast the generation of the Son with that of angels: Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, in *WJO*, 12:241–42.

and Spirit; wherefore if his was begotten, theirs must be also; much less to his human nature, in which he is never said to be begotten, but always to be made, and with respect to which he is without father: nor to his office as Mediator, in which he is not a Son, but a servant; besides, he was a Son previous to his being Prophet, Priest, and King; and his office is not the foundation of his sonship, but his sonship is the foundation of his office; or by which that is supported, and which fits him for the performance of it.²⁰¹

Gill again rejected many of the Socinian rationales for Christ's Sonship and other misconceptions, chief among them the idea that the Son's essence was generated. Gill dispelled this idea by concluding that generation refers to the generation of his person: "but it has respect to his person; for, as in human generation, person begets person, and like begets like, so in divine generation."²⁰²

Gill interpreted the "today" of Psalm 2:7 as an *eternal* today, thus maintaining personal distinction and consubstantiality between the Father and Son. Gill found support for this interpretation in both Micah 5:2 and Daniel 12:9. The word, "today," then, is a reference to eternity, for "since one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and as eternity itself."²⁰³ Gill, citing Isaiah 43:13, also referred to it as "one continued day, an everlasting now."²⁰⁴ Understanding "today" in this manner, Gill followed Vitranga and argued that Psalm 2:7 "is applicable to any day or time in which Christ is declared and manifested to be the Son of God." For Gill, such situations included his incarnation, baptism, transfiguration, and resurrection.²⁰⁵ Socinians, however, maintained that the

²⁰¹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:531.

²⁰² The following statement reveals Gill's consistent Trinitarian hermeneutic, as well as his doctrinal exposition of Scripture, when, after affirming that eternal generation refers to the person of Christ, he instructed, "but care must be taken to remove all imperfection from it, such as divisibility and multiplication of essence, priority and posteriority, dependence, and the like: nor can the modus or manner of it be conceived or explained by us." Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:531.

²⁰³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 155. Contrary to Gill, *The Racovian Catechism* taught that "since the words THIS DAY denote a fixed period of time, they cannot imply eternity." Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 72.

²⁰⁴ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:531. Gill used the term "eternal now" in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, where he cited all the texts mentioned above as support: Isaiah 43:13, Micah 5:2, and Daniel 12:9. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 146–47 [154–55], emphasis original.

²⁰⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 155. Gill had established this hermeneutical rule for interpreting Psalm 2:7 at least as early as *The Doctrine of the Trinity* in 1731. Here, he cited and paraphrased Vitranga: "Atque hinc est quod illud, *tu es filius meus*, Psal. ii. 7. applicetur in scriptis N. Test.

quotation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 was proof of Christ’s resurrection, not his eternal generation.²⁰⁶ On this point, Gill’s exegesis and theological reasoning closely followed Turretin, who argued, contrary to the Socinians, that the quotation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 is a manifestation of Christ’s eternal Sonship—“not that this generation consists in his resurrection.” Turretin explained how the resurrection manifested the eternal Sonship of Christ:

[B]y reason of manifestation (*phanerōseōs*) and declaration *a posteriori* because he is made known by it (as Paul interprets when he says that ‘Christ was declared [*horisthenta*] to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead,’ Rom. 1:4) according to the Scripture usage by which things are said to become or to be born when they are manifested (Prov. 17:17). Because, therefore, the resurrection was an irrefragable proof of his divinity and eternal filiation, the Holy Spirit, with the psalmist, could join both together and refer as much to the eternal generation as to its manifestation (which ought to be made in the resurrection). And Paul properly says that the oracle was fulfilled when its truth was exhibited, since by the resurrection the Father has most fully declared that he is really (*ontōs*) and peculiarly (*idiōs*) his own Son.²⁰⁷

Following a Reformed orthodox pattern of exegesis, this interpretation provided Gill not only with a consistent Trinitarian reading of numerous texts in which Christ’s Sonship is declared across the canon, but it also provided him with a polemic

omni casui; in quo Christus demonstratus est esse *Dei filius*.” Translated, “And since it is quoted here, *you are my Son*, Psal 2:7. It is applicable in the New Testament writings in every case in which Christ is demonstrated to be *Son of God*” (my translation). Campegii Vitringa, *Epilogus Disputationis, Non Ita Pridem a Se Habitæ, De Generatione Filii et Morte Fidelium Temporalis; in Quo Fidem Ecclesiæ de His Articulis Porro Adstruit Ex Verbo Dei, Eandemque Tuetur Contra Dissertationem, Illi Novissime Oppositam* (Franequeræ: Johannem Gyselaar, 1689), 44 [§28]. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (1731), 182. Gill affirmed the rule and provided the same quotation in the second edition. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 147 [155]. Mastricht treated the “today” in a twofold sense, the first being the Son’s generation from eternity and the second the “demonstration” of it at various points in salvation history. He sees this clearly at Christ’s baptism (Matt 3:17), transfiguration (Matt 17:5), and resurrection (Acts 13:33; Rom 1:4). Directly to the point, Mastricht stated, “Some with the Socinians refer this to the resurrection alone; others more correctly to the eternal communication of essence; and others to both, but primarily the communication of essence and secondarily to the manifestation made partly in baptism and partly in the resurrection, as we have said.” Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:542–43 [1.2.26.II].

²⁰⁶ *The Racovian Catechism* listed the quotation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 as a reason Psalm 2:7 cannot have eternal generation in view, since “Paul quotes this passage to prove the resurrection of Christ.” Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 72. Muller explains how this text was used by Socinians against the notion of the Son’s deity and how the Reformed orthodox answered their interpretations. Gill’s response is consistent with Muller’s presentation of other Reformed orthodox theologians. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:277–78.

²⁰⁷ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:294 [3.29.VIII].

against the Socinian idea that Christ's Sonship was established at these points in salvation-history. Rather than establishing Christ's Sonship, Gill argued, these texts exhibited it.²⁰⁸

Proverbs 8:22. Another text that Gill had not always affirmed as a proof of eternal generation was Proverbs 8:22. In *The Doctrine of the Trinity* he wrote, “[a]s for *Prov. viii.* it is a glorious proof of Christ's eternal existence, though not so clear an one of his eternal Sonship.”²⁰⁹ This sentiment, however, had changed by the time he published his *Exposition of the Old Testament*. There, Gill interpreted the text as proof of Christ's eternal Sonship. By the publication of *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Gill not only interpreted it this way, he insisted upon it.

Gill recognized both old and new interpretations that were contrary to a Trinitarian reading of this text. At least one obstacle to this interpretation was presented by the Septuagint's translation of the first phrase as “the Lord created me,” from which Arius advocated for his subordinationist Christology. Gill highlighted the difficulties of this reading, pointing to the fact that God was never without his Wisdom and that it was by his Wisdom that all things were made (John 1:1–3).²¹⁰

Gill, in polemical fashion, introduced another contrary reading of Proverbs 8:22: “Some, of late, have put a new sense on these words, equally absurd as the former, and interpret them of the creation of the human soul of Christ, in eternity; which, they

²⁰⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 155. Gill had established this hermeneutical rule for interpreting Psalm 2:7 at least as early as *The Doctrine of the Trinity* in 1731. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (1731), 182.

²⁰⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 147 [155].

²¹⁰ In *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, he put it this way: “But if the Wisdom of God, the person, here speaking, was created by God, then God must be without his Logos, word, and wisdom, until he was created; whereas, he was always with him; and besides, he is the Creator, and not a creature; for all things were made by him.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 155, Gill's translation. Gill argued similarly in his *Exposition*. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:382. Turretin also challenged the translation “created” and tried to give a rationale for the Septuagint rendering of this verse. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:296–97 [3.29.XII].

say, was then made and taken up into union with God.” Despite the absurdity of this interpretation in Gill’s estimation, he rebutted it with three points. First, Gill argued that Christ’s human soul is not a person and that the context demands that a person is speaking. Second, Christ took on a full human nature—body and soul—for our salvation. The idea that Christ’s human soul was united in eternity prior to the assumption of his human body breaks up Christ’s human nature and makes him unlike those whom he came to save. Third, and “most absurd” to Gill, was the idea that “this human soul is said to be created in eternity.” In short, Gill responded that a human soul made in eternity “is a contradiction in terms, time being nothing else but the measure of a creature’s duration.” Gill firmly believed that only God is eternal and “before time.” He thought the idea that Christ’s human nature, or even angels, were created before time began in Genesis 1:1, was potentially destructive to Scripture:

[F]or if there was any thing created before time, or before the world was, whether angel or a man, or a part of man, the human soul, or the whole human nature of Christ, our Bible must begin with a falsehood; and then who will believe what is said in it afterwards? . . . How careful should men be of venting their own whims and fancies, to the discredit of the Bible, and to the risk of the ruin of divine Revelation.²¹¹

One final error, which Gill thought led to the one prior, was the idea that Christ could not be Mediator in eternity without his human soul. Contrary to this notion, Gill contended that the Holy Spirit, who has no human nature, has an office in the economy of salvation. Without equivocation, Gill asserted that “Christ, as a divine Person, could and did take upon him the office of Mediator, without assuming human nature.” Gill believed that in the economy of salvation there were works that Christ accomplished in eternity prior to those acts that required he take on a human nature.²¹²

²¹¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 155–56.

²¹² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 156–57.

Despite these erroneous interpretations, Gill upheld Proverbs 8:22 as a proof of eternal generation. Taking the broader context of Proverbs 8 into account, Gill asserted that the phrases “being *possessed*, *brought forth*, and *brought up*” clearly revealed Christ’s eternal generation.²¹³ Gill established this interpretation in part by outlining the logic of verses 22–23. He argued that the mistranslation, “He created me,” better fit the idea of Christ being established Mediator. He pointed out, however, that this is what was meant in verse 23 by the phrase, “I was set up, or anointed.” The logic of these two verses, then, moves “in a very regular and orderly manner; he first gives an account of his eternal existence, as the Son of God, by divine generation; and then of constitution, as Mediator, in his office-capacity.” The meaning of each word was important for establishing the flow of argument: “this latter [word] is expressed by his being *set up*, and the former by his being *possessed* or *begotten*.”²¹⁴ Gill warranted his translation of this text as “begotten” by appealing to a Septuagint rendering of Zechariah 13:5.²¹⁵ Gill put these two ideas together and gave his sense of the passage:

[A]nd it may be rendered here, *the Lord begat me*, and so possessed him as his own Son, laid a claim to him, and enjoyed him as such; for this possession is not in right of creation, in such sense as he is the possessor of heaven and earth, Gen. xiv. 19, 22, but in right of paternity, in which sense the word is used, Deut. xxxii. 6. as a

²¹³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 155, emphasis original. In his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill assumed that “wisdom” could be properly applied to the Son. The central argument against this position in *The Racovian Catechism* was that Solomon used the figure of speech, *prosopopoeia*, of wisdom in Proverbs 8. Gill was not unaware of this interpretation, however, as his comments on Proverbs 8:23 begin, “I, a person, and not a quality; a person, and not a nature; the person of Christ as the Son of God, and not the human nature of Christ, which then did not exist.” Turretin argued that this could not be an instance of *prosopopoeia* based on the literary genre of this passage: “Nor can there be a personification (*prosopoeia*) here by which wisdom in general and in the abstract is introduced as speaking; for although *prosopopoeia* is admissible in amplifications and exaggerations (especially in fables), yet not in short and collected precepts, where the same thing is so often repeated and no intimation of a figurative locution is anywhere given. Otherwise there would be no certainty in Scripture if it were lawful to recur to *prosopopoeia* everywhere.” Both Turretin and Owen argued that what this verse says of wisdom can only be ascribed to a person. Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 73–74. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:383. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:295–96 [3.29.X]. Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicæ*, in *WJO*, 12:243–44. Gill’s understanding of wisdom as an attribute of God and as a reference to the Son is developed in chapter 5 under the heading, “The Wisdom of God.”

²¹⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157, Gill’s translations, emphasis original.

²¹⁵ Gill indicated that this translation came from the Septuagint version of Zechariah 13:5 in his *Exposition of the Old Testament*, but did not mention it in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:382. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157.

father lays claim to, possesses and enjoys his own son, being begotten by him, or signifies possession by generation, Gen. iv. 1.²¹⁶

Gill defined “possession” in Proverbs 8:22 with precision, distinguishing between possession by “right of creation,” which Gill found evidence of in Genesis 14:19 and 14:22, and possession by “right of paternity,” which was akin to his understanding of Deuteronomy 32:6. This understanding of Fatherly possession, Gill now believed, was a clear manifestation of Christ’s Sonship. And that it is an eternal Sonship is evinced in the following words, “in the beginning of his way,” or, more accurately, “the beginning of his way.”²¹⁷ Gill contended that the preposition “in” should be dropped since it was not in the Hebrew. In this rendering of the passage, then, the Son described himself as “the beginning of his way,” rather than “expressing the date” of his generation. Wisdom, therefore, stands at the very outset of the entirety of the divine acts of salvation.²¹⁸ From this exegetical observation, Gill moved toward his theological conclusion. Since the Son acted with God in his eternal works of salvation, Gill reasoned that “[t]his shews the real and actual existence of Christ from eternity, his relation to Jehovah his Father, his nearness to him, equality with him, and distinction from him.”²¹⁹ In this text, then, Gill found evidence for the unity and plurality of the Godhead as well as the Son’s eternal generation.

²¹⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157. Gill articulated a very similar explanation in his *Exposition*. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:382.

²¹⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157, Gill’s translation. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:382.

²¹⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157. The same interpretation is given in the *Exposition*. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:382–83. Edward Leigh, answering Arius’ objection to this text, came to the same conclusion as Gill: “This place much puzzled the Fathers for want of skill in the original Tongue; it is in the Hebrew Possessed me the beginning of his way.” Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity: Consisting of Ten Books. Wherein the Fundamentals and Main Grounds of Religion Are Opened; the Contrary Errours Refuted; Most of the Controversies Between Us, the Papists, Arminians and Socinians Discussed and Handled; Several Scriptures Explained, and Vindicated from Corrupt Glosses*, 2nd ed. (London: A. M. for William Lee, 1662), 260 [II.XVI].

²¹⁹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:383.

Gill observed further evidence of eternal generation in Proverbs 8. For instance, the phrase “brought forth” in 8:24 was translated as “conceived” in the Vulgate and “begotten” in the Targum and Syriac text. Furthermore, the Septuagint version of 8:25 was rendered “he begat me.” The same Hebrew word (הול) used in both verses, Gill argued, was used in other Old Testament texts to indicate generation, such as Job 15:7 and Psalm 51:5. The word was repeated, Gill contended, in 51:25, “partly to excite attention to it, as being of great moment and importance, and partly to observe the certainty of it; the eternal generation of Christ being an article of faith, most surely to be believed.” Gill additionally highlighted Proverbs 8:30, “Then was I by him, as one brought up with him,” which he considered another proof of eternal generation. Gill also suggested that the word נמז used in this text could also be translated “carried in his bosom,” bearing the sense “as a son by a nursing father” (Num 11:12; John 1:18).²²⁰

Once Gill had provided a definition of eternal generation and defended its veracity against its Socinian opposition, Gill sought to demonstrate it from the Scriptures. Biblical exegesis and theological reasoning, for Gill, was the only legitimate way to establish doctrine. This was especially true of the Trinity, which Gill considered “a great mystery of godliness.” Because it “is a doctrine of pure revelation,” revelation was the ultimate arbiter for determining its truthfulness.²²¹ Gill’s treatment of Psalm 2:7, Micah 5:2, and Proverbs 8:22 were consistent with Gill’s conviction that the Trinity is a doctrine of “pure revelation.” Not only that, his mature reflections on these texts provided him with further proof of the Son’s eternal generation from the Father and followed the patterns of Reformed scholastic exegesis.

²²⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157, Gill’s translations. Gill cited the following sources as lexical warrant for this alternative translation of נמז: Christiani Noldii, *Concordantiae Particularum Ebraeo-Chaldaicarum* (Ienae: Felicis Bielckii, 1734), No. 1884. Johannis Coccei, *Lexicon et Commentarius: Sermonis Hebraici et Chaldaici* (Francofurti ad Moenum: Balthasaris Christophori Wustii, 1689), 43. The exact editions of these works that Gill would have had on hand are uncertain since he does not provide print date, but the editions cited here correspond to the relevant sections that match Gill’s citation notes.

²²¹ Gill, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 1–2.

Understanding Eternal Generation

After explaining his sense of these key verses, Gill stated that other texts with the language of “begotten” could be provided as proof for eternal generation (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 1 John 4:9). Having proven eternal generation from key biblical texts, he then began to provide summary instructions for how to understand the difficult doctrine of eternal generation.²²² These instructions in *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* summarize a short section from *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and thus further illustrate the consistency of Gill’s Trinitarianism.²²³ Gill argued in his first point that eternal generation is the begetting of a person, namely, the Son. Eternal generation, then, does not refer to the Son as man, since he, as the “anti-type of Melchizedek,” “was not begotten, and so was without father.” The Son’s generation is also not the begetting of the Son’s essence because “his nature is the same with the nature of the Father and Spirit.”²²⁴ Thus, Gill stated: “I observe, that the divine nature of the Son is no more begotten than the divine nature of the Father, and of the Holy Ghost; the reason is, because it is the same divine nature, which is common to, and is posses’d by all three.” To further make this point, Gill explained the logic of the idea that the Son’s essence is generated: “Hence, it would follow, that if the divine nature of the Son was begotten, so would the divine nature of the Father, and of the Holy Ghost likewise.” Citing Wendelin as support, Gill asserted his position: “The divine essence neither begets nor is begotten. It is a divine person in the essence that begets, and a divine person in that essence that is

²²² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157.

²²³ In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill concluded Chapter 7 “Concerning the Sonship of Christ,” with four points “which may be of some service in the consideration of the momentous article of faith.” The first of these points consisted in his discussion of Psalm 2:7, Proverbs 8, Micah 5:2, and Isaiah 53:8, of which only Psalm 2:7 he believed at that time was a “proof” of eternal generation. Since Gill had just discussed these texts in the corresponding section of *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, he then moved to summarize the next three points that he previously wrote in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. He did, however, add one additional point in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* about the fact that while “eternal generation” is not a phrase in Scripture, the idea is there and must be believed. See more on that point below. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 148 [156].

²²⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 157.

begotten. Essence does not beget essence, but person begets person, otherwise there would be more than one essence: Whereas, though there are more persons than one, yet there is no more than one essence.”²²⁵ According to Gill’s reasoning, the generation of essence would multiply the essence of God, which he believed was numerically one. Reasoning partly from the idea that in human generation, persons beget persons, Gill argued that generation pertains only to a divine person in the essence.²²⁶ This guideline for understanding the Son’s generation consistently followed his prior discussion concerning the distinction of persons in the divine nature. Gill believed that the distinction of persons was not a distinction of the divine nature, “for that nature is one, and common to them all.” Rather, what he believed distinguishes the three persons are their personal relations and relative properties. It is peculiarly the Son’s relative property to be begotten, and so, as a divine person who shares the essence in common with the Father and Spirit, he is begotten of the Father.²²⁷

Gill next asserted that eternal generation is an immanent act: “I chuse rather to express myself with those divines, who say that the Son is begotten *in*, and not *out of* the divine essence. Christ, as God’s only begotten Son, is in the bosom of the Father. The Father is in him, and he is in the Father.”²²⁸ Just as it is the person of the Son that is generated, not the essence, so the person is not generated out of the divine essence, but in it. Gill clarified that by “out of” the essence he meant that “[t]he Father’s essence or substance is not the matter out of which he is begotten.” Both the Father and the Son share the essence in common with one another, and thus the Son could not be generated

²²⁵ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 149 [157].

²²⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 149 [157].

²²⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142.

²²⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 149 [157]. Elsewhere he stated, “and this begetting is not *out of*, but *in* the divine essence; it being an immanent and internal act in God.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 158. Owen corrected John Biddle on this point: “For Mr B’s question, then, we say not that the Son is begotten eternally *out of* the divine essence, but *in it*, it not by an eternal act of the Divine Being, but of the person of the Father.” Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicæ*, in *WJO*, 12:177.

out of it. That is, another divine nature could not be generated as there is only one essence shared by both Father and Son. Instead, as a necessary act within the divine essence, the Father generates the person of the Son: “The act of begetting is internal and immanent in God. The Father begets a divine person not *out of*, but *in* his nature and essence.”²²⁹ Gill’s third point was that this immanent act of generation must also be understood in a way that does not imply imperfection. Similar to what this dissertation has already observed in Gill, he instructed, “we are to remove every thing impure and imperfect, division and multiplication, priority and posteriority, dependence and the like.”²³⁰ For Gill, the analogy between human and divine generation must not be taken too far. Nevertheless, he thought that at least one basic similarity justified the comparison: “’tis enough that there is some kind of analogy and agreement between them, which occasions the use of the terms, generation, sonship, &c. for instance, as in human generation, person begets person, and like begets like; so it is in divine generation.”²³¹

After presenting all of his arguments for eternal generation, Gill reiterated the necessity for epistemic humility. Even though God had revealed that the Son was eternally generated by the Father as an immanent and eternal act within the divine essence, the precise nature of this reality can never be fully explained or understood. The way in which the Son is eternally begotten, Gill believed, cannot be known, nor should it be explained. In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill stated it thus: “The modus or manner of it, is not to be conceived of, or explained by us.”²³² And again, “as for the modus, or manner of it, we must be content to be ignorant of it, as we are of our own generation,

²²⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 149 [157]. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142.

²³⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 158. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 149–50 [157–58].

²³¹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 150 [158].

²³² Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 150 [158].

natural and spiritual.”²³³ The danger of pressing mankind’s epistemic limits were in part why Gill earlier in his ministry did not believe the Son’s identification as Logos entailed an analogy of the mind pointing to the reality of eternal generation.²³⁴ Human ignorance, Gill knew, was not limited to this doctrine, but to many other theological loci, such as Christ’s incarnation and the divine attributes. From this premise Gill argued that “If we must believe nothing but what we can comprehend, or account for the manner, or *how* it is, we must be obliged to disbelieve some of the perfections of God.” Not only that, but “there are many things in nature, and in philosophy, which must be given up, which yet are certain.” What was necessary, Gill contended, was to know *that* something is, even when one did not know *how* it is. With regard to eternal generation, then, “it is enough that Christ is revealed as begotten of the Father; though the manner how he is begotten cannot be explained.”²³⁵ In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill cited Ecclesiastes 11:3 and John 3:9 to support the idea that since we cannot understand “our own generation” or God’s act in regeneration, we should be content not to understand how the Son is eternally generated. In his *Body of Divinity*, however, Gill quoted Athanasius, who similarly wrote, “*How* the Father begat the Son, I do not curiously inquire; and *how* he sent forth the Spirit, I do not likewise curiously inquire; but I believe *that* both the Son is begotten, and the holy Spirit proceeds, in a manner unspeakable and impassible.” Gill produced a similar quote of Gregory of Nazianzus, “It is enough for me . . . that I hear of the Son; and that he is *of* the Father; and that the one is a Father, and the other a Son: and nothing besides this do I curiously inquire after.”²³⁶ Gill’s caution about mankind’s

²³³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 158.

²³⁴ Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:167–68. See more below in Chapter 5 under the heading, “Gill’s Initial Objection to the Analogy.”

²³⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 158, emphasis original. The language I have used here in italics closely resembles Gill’s: “that there is a God, or that there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead; which, however, clearly revealed in scripture *that* they are, yet the manner, or *how* they are . . . is incomprehensible and inexplicable by us” (p. 158).

²³⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 158.

epistemic limits and the inability to understand the Son’s generation—and the moral imperative not to inquire too far into it—followed not only the pattern of Nicene Trinitarianism, but also the Reformed orthodoxy. As Turretin had cautioned: “Hence here (if anywhere) we must be wise with sobriety so that content with the fact (*tō hoti*) (which is clear in the Scriptures), we should not anxiously busy our thoughts with defining or even searching into the mode (which is altogether incomprehensible), but leave it to God who alone most perfectly knows himself.”²³⁷

Gill’s final point was that even though the words “eternal generation” do not occur in Scripture, the idea is fully there and thus the term can be right, and biblically, applied to the Son. The issue of extra-biblical terms was not an issue for Gill; he defended them as this dissertation has already demonstrated. What was important for Gill was that the term denoted a Scriptural concept. In this case, Gill argued, “[i]t is most certain, that Christ is the Son of God; and it is as certain, that he is the *begotten* Son of God; and if begotten, then the word generation may be used of him, for what is begotten is generated.” And since he is God’s “proper” Son as a “divine Person,” Gill concluded that “with the utmost safety and propriety may eternal generation be attributed to him; and, indeed, in no other sense can he be the Son of God.”²³⁸

Conclusion

In excellent pedagogical form, at the end of Gill’s lengthy section on the Son’s eternal generation from the Father, he offered a brief closing statement of the phrase, “Son of God.” This closing statement forms a tight summary of his prior argumentation from *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, wherein Gill put forth his constructive description of Christ’s Sonship:

²³⁷ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:302 [3.29.XXXI]. Mastricht believed the same: Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:547 [1.2.26.VII].

²³⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 158–59.

To close all; this phrase, *the Son of God*, intends what is essential and natural to him; and suggests to us, that he is the true and natural Son of God; not a Son in an improper and figurative sense, or not by office, but by nature; that, as such, he is a divine Person, God, the true God, Heb. i. 8. 1 John v. 20. that he is equal with God, as the Jews understood him; in which they were not mistaken, since our Lord never went about to undeceive them, which he would have done had they misunderstood him, John v. 17, 18. and x. 30. and it is to be observed, that he has been concluded to be the Son of God from his divine perfections and works; from his omniscience, John i. 48, 49. from his omnipotence, Matt. xiv. 33. and from the marvellous things that happened at his crucifixion, Matt. xxvii. 54. In short, as the phrase, *the Son of man*, denotes one that is truly man; so the phrase, *the Son of God*, must intend one that is truly God, a divine Person; and as Christ is called the Son of man, from his nature in which he is man; so he is called the Son of God, from the nature in which he is God. I have been the longer upon the Sonship of Christ, because it is that upon which the distinction in the Godhead depends; take that away, and it cannot be proved there is any distinction of persons in it.”²³⁹

It may be best to conclude this survey with one final summative affirmation of Christ’s eternal Sonship, penned by Gill in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, where he concluded “that Christ is the true and natural Son of God, begotten by God the Father, in the divine nature or essence, though the modus of generation may be inexplicable to us.”²⁴⁰

John Gill’s doctrine of eternal generation formed the center of his Trinitarianism. He was solidly convinced that without it, the Trinity was indefensible. His doctrine of the Trinity affirmed a unity of essence shared among a plurality of persons, who Gill identified in Scripture as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who share the essence but are distinguished by necessary and immanent personal relations and relative properties. Using terminology of the Reformed orthodox, Gill defined the Son’s relative property with the term eternal generation. The Son’s generation formed the centerpiece to all the divine distinctions. Without it, the other distinctions did not hold together and thus the Trinity cannot be maintained. Gill defended his view against its Socinian opposition and then demonstrated the basis of Christ’s Sonship from the Scriptures. For Gill, Christ is the eternal Son who is eternally begotten by the Father in the divine essence. And

²³⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 159. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 142–46 [150–54].

²⁴⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 146 [154].

while this truth cannot be fully explained, it must be believed. As it has been shown, Gill's shared similar concerns with other Protestant Scholastics with regard to the Arianism and Socinianism. His exegesis, theological formulation and terminology, and method of argumentation follows the patterns set by the Reformed Orthodox throughout his writings on Christ's eternal Sonship.

CHAPTER 4

“THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE”: THE ETERNAL GENERATION AND ASEITY OF THE SON

There is one key area in which John Gill departed from the broader catholic tradition and that is by taking a minority Reformed view in his particular understanding of the aseity of the Son. This led to a denial of a communication of essence in eternal generation. In doing so, Gill evidenced a pattern of both theological traditionalism and independence. While Gill affirmed eternal generation, counting it as indispensable for grounding distinctions between the persons within the Godhead, he denied that eternal generation entailed a communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son. Generation, for Gill, was only the begetting of the Son’s person, and established the divine order and personal relations between the persons. As the second person, the Son is from the Father, but as God, he is of himself. This understanding of eternal generation flowed from Gill’s particular construal of God’s aseity. According to Gill, each of the divine persons fully possess the essence without any communication and without respect to their ordered subsistence. Each person equally, fully, and eternally partakes of the divine essence of himself.

While the broader tradition, from the early church through the reformation and post-Reformation eras, considered the communication of essence as a necessary component to the Son’s generation, John Calvin’s polemical assertion that the Son is *autotheos* set the stage for a diversity of views regarding the aseity of the Son and its connection to generation. Calvin’s view of aseity, which precluded a communication of essence in eternal generation, was followed by Gill. Not only that, Gill stated his view with particular clarity and directness. Thus, in following Calvin’s understanding of

generation and aseity, Gill departed from the mainstream of the catholic and Reformed orthodox traditions.

A brief overview of the traditional understanding of eternal generation as well as Calvin's development of the tradition in his use of autotheotic language is first presented in this chapter. Then, there is a brief examination of eternal generation and aseity among the Reformed scholastics of the post-Reformation. Finally, this chapter concludes with an explication of Gill's own view, demonstrating that he held to a minority Reformed position on eternal generation that flowed out of his doctrine of aseity.¹

“Classical Trinitarianism”: Generation through Communication²

In order to understand the significance of John Gill's Trinitarian theology, it must be set within the context of the broader tradition in general, and then his Reformed context in particular. The following section, then, seeks first to give an account of the traditional understand of eternal generation.

Classical Trinitarianism

The majority view of eternal generation is well known and established. It has, however, been recently reiterated and contrasted with a Reformation-era variant that is believed to have its origins in the thought of John Calvin (more on Calvin below).³ The

¹ The basis of this chapter came from reading Brannon Ellis' work on Calvin's doctrine of generation and aseity. His treatment of the history and function of key terms has greatly influenced my thinking on these matters, even though I do not fully agree with his conclusions. The remainder of this chapter will interact with his work to help establish the historical and theological development of eternal generation in order to rightly understand Gill's own doctrine. I am grateful for my conversations with Jacob Denhollander who originally pointed me towards this book. These conversations were important as I began working through this research. Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). I have taken the term "autotheotic" from Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin.

² When this dissertation refers to the "traditional," "classical," or "broader tradition," it is a reference to what Ellis terms "Classical Trinitarianism." See more below for the specific meaning of this term. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 64–65.

³ See Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*.

relevant aspect of the traditional view of eternal generation as it pertains to this dissertation is the idea that eternal generation consists in a communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son. Thus, it is the Son's distinct mode of subsistence to be eternally generated from the Father, and that this generation consists in the communication of the essence from the person of the Father to the person of the Son. While this generation is of the person of the Son from the Father, this generation of the Son's person necessarily involves a communication of the divine essence. The role that eternal generation played in the development of Trinitarian theology, however, contains further characteristics that are worthy of brief exploration in order better to understand Gill's place in the history of Trinitarian thought.⁴

According to the recent work of Brannon Ellis, there are five functions of eternal generation in what he calls "Classical Trinitarianism."⁵ According to Ellis, eternal generation in classical Trinitarianism "(1) asserts personal distinction; (2) describes taxis, or order of subsistence and operation; (3) secures consubstantiality; (4) confirms equality; and (5) informs perichoresis."⁶ The first function relates to personal language about God, as opposed to essential language about God. The distinction between language that denotes the distinction of persons—relational or personal language—and that which denotes the unity or common essence of the divine persons—essential language—is what Ellis refers to as "the two ways of speaking" about God that was "*fundamental to the*

⁴ This paragraph has benefitted from the work of Ellis mentioned in the previous footnote.

⁵ The next few paragraphs overview Brannon Ellis' account of the function of eternal generation in what he terms in his book, "Classical Trinitarianism." His work mainly follows the development of this theology in the Western tradition. Following Ellis' lead, by proposing a "classical Trinitarianism" I do not wish to convey the idea that there was no diversity throughout history on these issues. The usefulness and intention of my broad overview concurs with the following statement by Ellis, who writes, "I do not address in any detail the tremendous variety in patristic and medieval exposition of these and other themes. I freely acknowledge this variety, while nevertheless suggesting that the theological role of eternal presented here, and my conclusions drawn from it, are properly basic enough to apply suitably to the broad mainstream of classical formulation." Ellis proposal of the five functions of eternal generation in "Classical Trinitarianism" is supported by a thorough engagement of the original sources such as Tertullian, Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 64–65.

⁶ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 69–70.

formulation and exposition of classical trinitarianism.”⁷ Thus, the first function of eternal generation refers to language used to distinguish between the persons within the Godhead, as opposed to denoting the essence, possessed by all three persons within it. As such, eternal generation “speaks to the identities or characteristics of Father and Son with respect to one another, and thus belongs to and is located in thought and speech concerning ‘irreducible threeness’ in God.”⁸ Disputes during the early church revealed that the distinction between personal and essential language is vital to holding together both the unity (of essence) and distinction (of persons) in God.⁹ By carefully speaking in this way, Trinitarians have attempted to guard the church from views which tend either to “conflate” the three persons (Sabellianism), or cause “division” within the essence (Arianism).¹⁰

Second, eternal generation, while asserting personal distinction, goes even further to describe “*ordered* subsistence.” Ellis writes:

Father and Son are reciprocal names, and paternity and filiation are reciprocal relations, but they are not flatly correlative. One may hold to ‘eternal Sonship,’ for

⁷ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 65, cf. 65–70. Ellis’ theological argument is that the classic view of eternal generation inconsistently applies the two ways of thinking by explaining that the Son’s generation is a communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son. According to Ellis, this view smuggles essential language into the idea of generation, which in his view speaks strictly to the Son’s personal distinction. Thus, Ellis believes the two ways of thinking are “conflated.” Ellis explains thus: “In this faith (in the Son begotten of the Father) seeking understanding (of the manner of his procession), there are tensions present in the latter. The trinity of God is emphatically maintained, but the language appropriate to this trinity seems subtly transgressed in ‘arriving at’ it—that is to say, the force of the grammar of trinity is resisted in describing the essential oneness of the distinct persons in God as logically dependent upon the essentially communicative manner of strictly personal origination. This subtle conflation of the two ways of speaking moves in both directions. For the same reason that essential unity is spoken of in comparative language (as eternally given and received), relational distinction is spoken of with reference to the essence per se: an essentially communicative understanding of the nature of eternal generation places distinctions regarding *modes of possessing the divine essence* at the heart of the personal identities of Father and Son. Describing such a manner for eternal generation is, therefore, a point at which classical doctrinal exposition has inadvertently transgressed the rules of the trinitarian language for which it so eloquently contends” (p. 69).

⁸ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 70.

⁹ See Ayres’ discussion of the Pro-Nicene use of language and the doctrines of simplicity, inseparable operations, and appropriation, to convey their Trinitarian unity and distinction: Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 278–301.

¹⁰ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 76.

example, without affirming taxis in God—but eternal *generation* is ineluctably ordered and directional . . . The Son is Son because he originates by generation from his Father, and the Father is Father because he originates from no one, but generates his Son.¹¹

This ordered mode of being within the divine essence is peculiar to each individual person—Father, Son, and Spirit. The Cappadocian term to express these modes of being was *hypostasis*, which denoted the distinctions between the persons that “pertain not to the divine nature or its common activity, but to an order of cause or personal origination.” Thus, as it related to generation, it was understood that “essence cannot be said to generate or be generated. The Father generates and the Son is generated, who together are the simple (unoriginated) essence of God without differentiation.”¹²

The third function of eternal generation in classical Trinitarianism was to secure consubstantiality.¹³ According to Ellis, “One of the key theological functions classically assigned to the doctrine of eternal generation is to account for the simple unity of the Son with the Father notwithstanding their distinction from one another. Or, put more strongly, for classical exposition, Father and Son are one by virtue of the manner of their distinction.”¹⁴ Thus, generation secures consubstantiality because “in begetting the Son, the Father eternally has given to the Son not only to be Son, but to *be* entirely. In this sense, generation is the Father’s giving of essence that constitutes the Son one only God, and generateness is reception of the same.” In eternal generation, then, there is a “giving of essence” that supports consubstantiality. Ellis is careful to note, however, that “this is not mean in any way to posit a distinction between Father and Son with respect to essence or even successive existence, because it is the Father’s selfsame essence that is

¹¹ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 78–79.

¹² Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 78–83.

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, the following summary comes from Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 83–96.

¹⁴ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 84.

given eternally, wholly, intraessentially, indivisibly, and unmultipliedly to the Son.”¹⁵

With these crucial qualifications, eternal generation may be understood not only to distinguish the persons, but also to secure the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father.

Classical Trinitarians utilized John 10:29–30 as proof that generation secured consubstantiality. Although the text has variant readings, they understood the verse to mean that what the Father gave the Son—the divine essence—was greater than all things. Arians, both ancient and those in the long eighteenth century, interpreted it to say that the Father, who is greater than all things, gave the sheep to his Son. For the Pro-Nicenes, this giving and receiving of the essence ensured the unity of the Father and Son in the divine nature:

The manner of generation in securing consubstantiality was presented as the basis for unity of these distinct divine persons. Because the Father eternally has imparted the Son ‘what is greater than all’ (his own deity), and its character is essentially simple and unique, infinite and unchangeable, unmultiplied and undivided, the generating Father and generated Son are *therefore*, in all their mutual and ordered distinction, nevertheless one selfsame essence. *Essential communication is the manner or ‘way’ of the Son’s procession as God from God, which establishes his consubstantiality with the Father.*¹⁶

Not only that, but generation, understood as a communication of the essence, also gave definition to “the character of the personal distinctions in God as rooted in *distinct manners of possessing this essence.*”¹⁷ Since the Son receives the essence through communication, eternal generation, then, establishes the manner in which the Son exists in the essence. To illustrate this manner in which each person possesses the essence, Ellis

¹⁵ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 84.

¹⁶ I will continue to use this phrase “essential communication” by Ellis below to refer to the communication of the essence. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 86–87, emphasis original.

¹⁷ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 94, emphasis original.

explains that “[t]he Father possesses the entire essence uncommunicately (ingenerately), the Son possesses the entire essence by communication from the Father (generately).”¹⁸

The fourth function of eternal generation in its classical form was to assert co-equality between the persons of the Godhead. According to Ellis, “The Son is equal to the Father *because* he is the selfsame God with him. By generation the Son is precisely what the Father is as God, and is glorified—or rejected—as such.” Although the Son is from the Father, classic Trinitarians explained this in such a way as to remove any notion of the Son being inferior.¹⁹ This function, along with the third, are the most important for this dissertation as it relates to Gill, since he affirmed full the equality and consubstantiality of the Son apart from eternal generation. In other words, Gill did not prove the Son’s consubstantiality and equality *on the basis* of his eternal generation. As this dissertation will demonstrate, Gill referenced equality and consubstantiality somewhat more defensively with reference to eternal generation, arguing not that they are *proven* by his eternal generation, but that they are *consistent with it*. These two points, then, were the main sources of discontinuity in Gill’s theology with respect to the function of eternal generation in classic Trinitarian theology.

Lastly, eternal generation informed perichoresis. In the doctrine of perichoresis, Ellis explains, there is a communion that “never conflates the persons, or erases their identities.” Perichoresis is that mutual indwelling which “takes its character from the immanent movement of the processions and their taxis,” and is “rooted in simple essential unity—it neither constitutes the divine unity, nor contradicts simplicity.” Thus, the eternal procession of the Son as begotten informs the way in which the Father and Son are to be understood as indwelling one another in communion.²⁰

¹⁸ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 95.

¹⁹ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 96–97, emphasis original.

²⁰ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 97–98.

As the above functions of eternal generation demonstrates, critical to the definition of eternal generation was the idea that the Son received the essence from the Father, and from this, then, his consubstantiality and equality. What follows is a brief account of Calvin, who broke from the classical understanding of generation in his declaration of the Son as *autotheos*.

John Calvin: Continuity and Discontinuity

One cannot understand Gill's claims of aseity and generation apart from the development of this doctrine in Calvin. In order to understand Gill's doctrine of the Son's aseity, then, it is important to trace the development of this doctrine through John Calvin. It is Calvin's use of the term in Trinitarian polemics, along with its subsequent reception, that has generated discussion regarding Calvin's place within the tradition. This dissertation contends with others, that along with Calvin's deep continuity with classic Trinitarianism, there is an element of discontinuity.²¹ This discontinuity is important both theologically and historically. Calvin's discontinuity, which some might understand as "development," provided a theological critique of the way in which classical Trinitarian grammar was used, and acts as a genesis to different reformed ways of thinking.²² The

²¹ Language of "continuity" and "discontinuity" with regard to the Reformed tradition in my usage come sources like the following: Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:37–46. Cf. Willem J. van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 10–22.

²² This is Ellis' specific claim. He views Calvin's "theology as marking a significant advance in the doctrine of the Trinity—not departing from or undermining classical language and exposition, or merely assenting to it, but *developing* it. This development involved, but was not restricted to, his celebrating contributions to expounding the economy of redemption. In this view, Calvin's theology also marked a positive material development in the classical doctrine of the immanent Trinity." According to Ellis, Calvin's development exposed a tension in classical Trinitarianism: "To state my thesis in terms of—yet somewhat over against—Warfield's conclusions, he was fundamentally right to suggest that, with Calvin's assertion of the Son's aseity, the Nicene homoousian fully came into its own. That is to say, Calvin's approach was consistently and emphatically classical, so much so that certain tension in his own tradition's trinitarianism were exposed—the eminently orthodox confession of simple consubstantiality was turned against the eminently orthodox conceptuality of the manner of divine procession." Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 7, 9–10. Robert Letham takes notice of Calvin's claims of the Son's aseity, also demonstrating that Calvin denied a communication of essence in generation. Letham, however, characterizes Calvin's overall import apart from his *autotheos* claims. According to Letham, Calvin's significance lay in his departure from the "medieval scholastic approach" to a "thoroughgoing biblical exposition," as well as his reception of the Eastern Fathers. Thus, Letham

purpose of this chapter is to show that John Gill was more Calvinistic than classical in his understanding of aseity and eternal generation.

As Ellis characterizes it, the discontinuity in Calvin's Trinitarianism was his resistance to the "*essentially communicative manner* of the Father's eternal generation of his Son." According to Ellis, this arose from Calvin's attempt to be consistent in speaking of God "essentially" and "relatively."²³ Thus, Ellis explains,

[I]n generation the Father ineffably communicates or imparts to the Son possession of the divine essence. This communication must be thought of in accord with the perfection of God, as eternal, intra-essential, and simple—without composition or change, multiplication or division. In this way God the Son is constituted an integral hypostasis of the divine essence fully and simply consubstantial with the Father, who is and possesses the same deity of himself. Describing the Father as 'of himself' does not mean that he is *causa sui* (self-caused), but *a nullo* (from no one else). He is true God uncommunicatedly so, while the Son is the selfsame God by communication from the Father.

Calvin's autothean claims challenged the legitimacy of such an account, not because his divine ontology was unsophisticated or overly 'physical,' nor because he felt the immanent Trinitarian relations are irrelevant for us to acknowledge and embrace. Rather, Calvin refused to conceive of the manner of eternal generation in any way that required speaking of the simple divine essence per se in a relative or comparative way.²⁴

Calvin's concern for the use of Trinitarian grammar is clear in his 1537 letter to Simon Grynee, in which he recounted his struggles with Pierre Caroli: "Certainly, if the distinction between the Father and the Word be attentively considered, we shall say that the one is from the other. If, however, the essential quality of the Word be

concludes, "[f]ar from being a reviser of the doctrine of the Trinity, Calvin both preserves and develops the inheritance he receives." Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, rev. and exp. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019), 297–306, 309, 310–11. This particular view of Calvin is not held to by all. For instance, Kevin Giles takes Calvin's comments in the Institutes 1.13.23 to indicate that he did hold to a communication of essence. Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 180–81.

²³ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 12–13. For another helpful conversation of some of the ideas developed, see Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 35–57. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 297–306, 309. Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History, and Modernity* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 166–70. Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son*, 176–86. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1956), 232–84.

²⁴ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 13.

considered, in so far as he is one God with the Father, whatever can be said concerning God may be applied to him, the second person in the glorious Trinity.”²⁵ Calvin here affirmed not only consubstantiality, but also ordered, personal relation. For Calvin, right speaking of God required that we either consider God either essentially, “so far as he is God with the Father,” or relatively, “that the one is from the other.”

Calvin applied this conviction about the two ways of speaking about God to his understanding of the Son as *autotheos*.²⁶ This designation was understood by Calvin to speak of the Son as he is God. For Calvin, as the Son is God, he is of himself. Thus, since aseity is an attribute of God, as the Son is considered essentially he is God of himself just as the Father is. The difference, then, between Calvin and the classical understanding of aseity is the place of communication involved in generation. Whereas the classical account of generation believed the Son’s consubstantiality (and thus his aseity) is communicated to him in generation, notions of communication were absent in Calvin. Instead, Calvin displayed an understanding of the Son’s aseity in which he possesses the divine essence of himself like the Father.²⁷

In the *Institutes*, Calvin articulated his understanding of the Son’s generation from the Father as a personal relation, and his aseity, as an attribute he possessed as God. When speaking of the Son in the divine essence, he is of himself; to speak of him, however, distinct from the Father, he is from the Father. Thus, Calvin wrote, “Therefore, when we speak simply of the Son without regard to the Father, we well and properly declare him to be of himself; and for this reason we call him the sole beginning. But

²⁵ John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 4:55–56. This passage is also quoted in Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 43. Ellis outlines the Calvin’s controversy with Caroli on pp. 39–50. See also Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 239–41.

²⁶ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 31–33.

²⁷ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 31–36. Letham’s interpretation of Calvin appears consistent with Ellis. He evaluates Calvin’s comments on the language of “God of God” in his dispute with Gentile by stating that “Calvin weighs the views of the fathers, particularly Athanasius, and concludes that the creed is speaking of the personal relations and does not imply any communication of essence or concomitant subordination.” Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 304.

when we mark the relation that he has with the Father, we rightly make the Father the beginning of the Son.”²⁸ In another statement of great clarity concerning the two ways of speaking, Calvin stated, “Therefore we say that deity in an absolute sense exists of itself; whence likewise we confess that the Son since he is God, exists of himself, but not in respect of his Person; indeed, since he is the Son, we say that he exists from the Father. Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself.”²⁹

The Reformed Tradition: Generation through Communication

Despite Calvin’s formative influence on the Reformation, his particular autotheotic doctrine of the Son remained the minority view—even among the reformed.³⁰ Calvin’s doctrine of aseity, for instance, was a point of contention at the Westminster Assembly. It appears, however, that Calvin’s doctrine of eternal generation and aseity was the minority view at the Assembly.³¹ It does appear, however, that Calvin had some supporters—not all of whom understood Calvin the same way. At least one supporter of

²⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 1559 translation ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 144 [1.23.19].

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 154 [1.23.25]. While Calvin never explicitly denied a communication of essence, he seems to studiously avoid it. Where others would have inserted language of communication, it is visibly absent in Calvin’s writings on the Trinity. Warfield stated a similar observation when he wrote of Bellarmine’s assessment of Calvin, “The evidence on which Bellarmine relies for his view that Calvin taught a communication of essence from the Father to Son is certainly somewhat slender.” Then, in describing the converse view of Calvin, he pointed out that “It is quite true that there is nothing absolutely clear to be found to the opposite effect either. But there are several passages which may be thought to suggest a denial that the Son derives His essence from the Father.” Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 258–59.

³⁰ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 169–70. Muller notes that “[t]he radical statement of the Son’s aseity found in Calvin’s trinitarian polemic is not echoed by all of the early orthodox Reformed theologians.” However, in the face of Arminian denials of aseity, as well as its connection with subordinationist and antitrinitarian theology in the seventeenth century, the doctrine of aseity received attention and “positive formulation” into the eighteenth century. Thus, while there may have been hesitation in early orthodoxy, it appears from Muller that it latter received wider acceptance, in one form or another. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:326–32.

³¹ Mark Jones, “John Calvin’s Reception at the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649),” *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1–2 (2011): 115–22. Cf. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 95–97.

Calvin, Francis Cheynell, believed Calvin held to idea of an essential communication in eternal generation. Daniel Featley, however, defended Calvin's *autotheos* view by rejecting the idea that the essence was communicated.³² He, like Calvin, balked at the idea of communication by appealing to the two ways of speaking of God personality and essentially. In the end, the "Autotheanites" at the Assembly were not impressed by attempts to create statements that both respected the Nicene Creed and Calvin. They did not think that the Nicene Creed was compatible with their theology."³³

Beeke and Jones highlight the differences in Puritan theology regarding the exact meaning of eternal generation: "The doctrine of eternal generation of the Son was agreed upon by all Reformed theologians. What they did not all agree upon, however, was the precise meaning of the Father's generation of the Son. So it was possible to be Nicean and yet have somewhat differing views on what it means for the Son to be 'God of God.' Consequently, the Reformed orthodox all held to the aseity (self-existence) of God the Son, but with different nuances." Beeke and Jones, however, argue that Calvin's position was the minority view among the Puritans. In their view, while most of the Puritan and Reformed orthodox affirmed the aseity of the Son, they did so while also affirming that the Son's essence is communicated as part of generation.³⁴

Similarly, in Rehman's estimation, the Reformed Orthodox held to a communication of essence between the divine Persons:

The divine essence can also be communicated to divine persons. According to Orthodoxy, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share being God; or the divine essence is common to the divine persons. Still, the manner in which the Father is God, the manner in which the Son is God, and the manner in which the Holy Spirit is God cannot be common. But, although Father, Son, and Holy Spirit differ from each other, they are not three things The divine essence must be communicable

³² Jones, "John Calvin's Reception at the Westminster Assembly," 220–222.

³³ Chad Van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1643–1652," (PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 2004), 1:245. Jones also quotes the same text here: Jones, "John Calvin's Reception at the Westminster Assembly," 221.

³⁴ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 95–97.

as to identity but not to multiplication, since otherwise it would be triple. For God's communication of essence is not finite and so is not subject to material and temporal boundaries. So the numerically one divine essence is communicated to the three persons as a singular nature to its subjects (*suppositis*), since the divine nature is unique, infinite, and undividable.³⁵

Thus, Calvin's view of generation and aseity—that the Son was *autotheos* in a manner that precluded a communication—was not the view held in common with most of the Reformed tradition that followed after him. The Reformed view of eternal generation *as a communication of essence* is evinced by Mastricht, who appears in one place to have substituted the phrase, “the eternal communication of essence,” for the term “eternal generation.”³⁶ For Mastricht, as well as many other Reformed theologians, eternal generation was understood as a communication of the essence from the Father to the Son.

In the debate against the various forms of Socinianism, Reformed theologians who understood generation as communication of the essence could argue that essential communication securely grounded their claims that Christ is God's “proper” Son by generation. John Owen, for instance, argued in his *Vindiciae Evangelicae* that “He who is ἴδιος υἱός, the ‘proper son’ of any, is begotten of the substance of his father.” Applying this to Christ, Owen asserted that “Christ is the proper Son of God, and God he called often ἴδιον Πατέρα, his ‘proper Father.’ He is properly a father who begets another of his substance; and he is properly a son who is so begotten.” Owen contrasted this conception of “proper” sonship with “metaphorical” sonship, reasoning that

for any thing whatever is metaphorically said to be what it is said to be by a translation and likeness to that which is true. Now, if Christ be not begotten of the essence of his Father, he is only a metaphorical Son of God, by way of allusion, and cannot be called the proper Son of God, being only one who hath but a similitude to a proper Son; so that it is a plain contradiction that Christ should be the proper Son of God, and yet not be begotten of his Father's essence.

³⁵ Sebastian Rehnman, “The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 393.

³⁶ Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, vol. 2, *Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Michael T. Spangler, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 543 [1.2.26.II].

For Owen, “The only-begotten Son of God is his *natural Son*, begotten of his essence, and there is no other reason of this appellation.”³⁷ Far from rational speculation into the divine essence, the idea of communication grounded the true nature of Christ’s Sonship and provided a basis for understanding him as God’s proper Son. Gill’s argumentation for establishing the basis of Christ’s Sonship was explored in the previous chapter. While Gill’s overall argumentative approach shared some similarities with the Reformed orthodox, his argumentation was less explanatory than Owen’s with respect to the nature of Christ’s proper Sonship. While Gill argued that the Son is the Father’s “proper” Son through generation, he did not define it in terms of a communication based in eternal generation. While Gill considered Christ God’s proper Son because he was begotten by the Father and shares the same essence as God, he did not ground the nature of proper Sonship in communicative generation. Thus, his argument lacked this specific explanatory feature found in John Owen that provided a rationale for the Son’s “proper” Sonship.

Francis Turretin and Aseity

The fact that the majority of the Reformed did not hold Calvin’s view did not, however, keep some of them from “harmonizing” their view with Calvin.³⁸ The idea of the Son as *autotheos* became commonplace within Reformed tradition, understood and

³⁷ John Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ; or, The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 12:185–86. The argument is not quite as direct, but Turretin argues that the Son’s generation through communication accounts for his Sonship and makes it the central question in establishing his deity. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, *First through Tenth Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 282, 292–93, 298–99 [3.28.III, 3.29.IV, 3.29.XIV–XVI].

³⁸ Ellis cites Beza as one who attempted to harmonize Calvin’s view, with one that affirms generation by communication. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 169–70. Turretin may be chief among this list, since he defended Calvin’s use of *autotheos* language yet defined aseity differently by conceiving of eternal generation as a communication of essence. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:291–92 [3.28.XL]. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:326–32. Mark Jones also mentions this phenomenon. Jones, “John Calvin’s Reception at the Westminster Assembly,” 220. Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 96–97.

explained in various senses.³⁹ Regardless of how the Reformed appropriated Calvin's view, Warfield was correct when he stated that Calvin's assertion of the Son's aseity changed the conversation such that theologians would thereafter have to reckon with it.

Warfield wrote thus:

It has never since been possible for men to escape facing the question whether they really do justice to the true and complete deity of the Son and Spirit in their thought of the Trinitarian distinction. It has not even been possible since for men who heartily believe in the deity of the Son and Spirit to refuse them the designation of *αὐτοθεός*. They may have distinguished, indeed, between *αὐτόθεος* and *αὐτοθεός*—Self-Existent God and Very God—and allowed the latter to the second and third Persons while withholding the former. But in the very act of drawing such a distinction, they have emphasized the true deity of the second and third Persons, and have been deterred from ascribing *αὐτοθεότης* to them in the sense of self-existence only by confusing it with 'ingeneration.' It is, however, a part of the heritage, particularly of the Reformed Churches, that they have learned from Calvin to claim for Christ the great epithet of *αὐτόθεος*.⁴⁰

Francis Turretin, one of Calvin's successors at Geneva, was among those theologians who had to reckon with Calvin's claims. While Turretin affirmed the Son's as *autotheos*, he did so by incorporating into a classical understanding of generation as a communication of essence. A brief outline of his thought on the Son's aseity will help accentuate the contrast between Gill and the classical position—even a classical and Reformed approach.

In his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Turretin approached eternal generation having established the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. To prove the Son's consubstantiality, Turretin utilized four arguments that, as this dissertation has highlighted, were common among the Reformed. Turretin thus proved the Son's consubstantiality arguing that the Son is given the names of God, shares the attributes of

³⁹ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:324–32. Additionally, Ellis has two chapters in which he charts out the various forms in which aseity was construed after Calvin. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 137–96.

⁴⁰ Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 273–74.

God, does the works of God, and is given worship due only to God.⁴¹ Turretin defended Calvin on this point, arguing that the Son may be called *autotheos*, that is, God of himself. His explanation of the Son's aseity consisted in multiple qualifications. According to Turretin, the Son is "God-of-himself (*autotheos*), not with respect to his person, but essence; not relatively as Son (for thus he is from the Father), but absolutely as God." Turretin continued very carefully to explain that the Son is *autotheos* "inasmuch as he has the divine essence existing from itself and not divided or produced from another essence (but not as having that essence from himself)." For Turretin, the Son is God of himself through a communication of the essence—an essence that exists from itself. The Son, however, does not have the essence from himself, but from the Father. Thus, the Son is *a se* in that his essence "is not divided or produced from another essence." Nevertheless, he received the essence via communication from the Father in generation. In this way Turretin concludes, "So the Son is God from himself [via a communication from the Father] although not the Son from himself." Furthermore, Turretin affirmed the Son's equality with God "with respect to eternal deity communicated to him from eternity." Turretin, it seems, believed he was articulating Calvin's view. He defended Calvin after explaining how the Son is *autotheos*, declaring, "Hence it is evident how unjustly Genebrardus and other papists charged Calvin with heresy here." And in highlighting Calvin's polemical statements against Valentine Gentile, he contended that Calvin believed "the Son and the Holy Spirit received their essence from the Father."⁴² Nevertheless, Turretin, as did most of the Reformed, understood generation as securing consubstantiality and affirming equality.

Having proved the unity of the Father and Son in the divine essence, Turretin then moved to discuss that which distinguishes them—eternal generation. Turretin

⁴¹ Turretin articulated other arguments, including his discussion of aseity, although these were his leading arguments. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:283–92 [3.28.V–XLI].

⁴² Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:291–92 [3.28.XL–XLI].

employed human generation as an analogy for the Son's generation, but with great caution. He reasoned that since human generation includes a communication of essence, so also does divine generation: "As all generation indicates a communication of essence on the part of the begetter to the begotten (by which the begotten becomes like the begetter and partakes of the same nature with him), so this wonderful generation is rightly expressed as a communication of essence from the Father." Through this generation, Turretin explained, the Son is made to possess "the same essence with him and is made perfectly like him."⁴³ Turretin further described the nature of generation as being without time, place, or change. The Son's generation is "without time," such that there is no "priority or posteriority of duration." This generation is also "[w]ithout place (*achronōs*) because the Father did not beget out of himself, but in the same essence." And, it is "Without any passage (*apathōs*) or change, either in the Father or the Son, since that he begat denotes no imperfection." Instead this generation is a "reception of all perfection" by the Son.⁴⁴

In his *Institutes*, Turretin's doctrine of eternal generation through communication played an important role in both distinguishing the persons and establishing the Son's consubstantiality. In distinguishing the persons, eternal generation denotes the son's "personal property" and follows the divine ordering of the Godhead. According to Turretin, the Father has "a certain preeminence" with respect to order of subsistence. For this reason the early church father referred to him as "the fountain of deity" because he communicates the essence to both the Son and Spirit and is the first in the "order of operating." Turretin's harmonization of Calvin's view is best on display when Turretin contended for a communication of essence while also asserting that the generation of the Son refers to person and not essence: "So the Son is said to be from the

⁴³ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:292–93 [3.29.I, IV].

⁴⁴ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:293 [3.29.V].

Father by generation; and not with respect to essence and absolutely as God, but with respect to person and reduplicatively (*reduplicative*) as Son. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son by spiration; for generation and spiration are communicative of the essence to the term of personality.”⁴⁵

In addition to distinguishing the Son in his personal property, eternal generation secured the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father through a communication of essence. For Turretin, the real test of the Son’s divinity was whether he could be considered God’s “proper” Son. And this was dependent upon whether or not the Son received “from the Father by ineffable generation the same numerical essence with the Father.”⁴⁶ As this dissertation has just demonstrated, Turretin affirms just this, asserting that the Son is consubstantial, and equal to the Father by means of generation, through which generation the Son received the divine essence through communication from eternity. Thus, with respect to the central contention of this paper—eternal generation through communication—Francis Turretin follows the classical Trinitarian paradigm while simultaneously incorporating Calvin’s claim that the Son is *autotheos*.

This brief overview has served to illustrate what others have argued—that by and large the Reformed consensus affirmed eternal generation by communication. It was not understood the same way by all, however, and their appropriation of Calvin’s claims differed. The evidence reveals, nonetheless, that Calvin’s view held a minority status among the Reformed. It is this “minority report” that Gill held, to which we now turn.

John Gill: God the Son as the Fountain of Life

John Gill followed Calvin in his understanding of God the Son as *autotheos*, which resulted in a doctrine of eternal generation that, unlike the traditional view, excluded a communication of essence from the Father.

⁴⁵ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:280–81 [3.27.XVI–XVII].

⁴⁶ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:282 [3.28.III].

Generation without Communication

In order to explore Gill's doctrine of eternal generation as it related to his doctrine of aseity, it will be wise to review some key components of his doctrine of eternal generation and comment where they relate to these issues. As this dissertation has already demonstrated, Gill's doctrine of God moved from God's unity, to plurality, to Trinity. According to Gill, rightly understanding God's unity and plurality in Trinitarian terms required understanding the distinctions between the persons of the Godhead. Consistent with Reformed scholasticism, Gill defined the distinction of persons in the divine essence as real, modal, and personal. These real, modal, and personal distinctions, he believed, were eternal, independent of God's works *ad extra*, and were a necessary aspect of God's existence. Gill, using language common among the Reformed, referring to these personal distinctions as personal relations or relative properties. These personal relations, relative properties, or modes of subsistence as Gill termed them, in which the three persons commonly share the divine essence, are paternity, filiation, and spiration. Expressed in another way by Gill, it is the Father who begets, the Son who is begotten, and the Spirit who is breathed. For Gill, each of these modes of subsistence distinguish each person from the others. They are relations that consist of incommunicable personal properties that belong to each person by which they are distinguished and relate to one another in the divine essence. Since the Son's mode of subsistence was to be begotten, it was for this reason that he is "called 'the only begotten of the Father,' John 1.14. which distinguishes him from the first and third, and gives him the name of the Son."⁴⁷

With respect to distinguishing the persons, the doctrine of eternal generation was an absolute necessity for Gill, as this dissertation has previously shown. Without eternal generation, none of the personal distinctions could be upheld and the doctrine of

⁴⁷ John Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, 1839 ed. (repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 140–42. Cf. John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc'd into the Form of a Treatise*, 2nd ed. (Southwark, England: George Keith, 1752), 48–49.

the Trinity could therefore not be supported. Gill considered this doctrine fundamental to the Christian religion.⁴⁸ The generation of the Son not only distinguishes between the Son and the Father, but it also reveals the distinction between the Spirit and the Father and Son. Gill's statement to this effect is worth quoting again:

If one of these distinct Persons is a Father, in the divine nature, and another a Son in the divine nature, there must something in the divine nature which is the ground of the relation, and distinguishes the one from the other; and can be nothing else than generation, and which distinguishes the third Person from them both, as neither begetting nor begotten. From generation arises the relation, and from relation distinct personality . . . Upon the whole, it is easy to observe that the distinction of Persons in the Deity depends on the generation of the Son; take away that, which would destroy the relation between the first and second Persons, and the distinction drops.⁴⁹

In this statement, Gill put forth the idea that without the personal relation of the Son, there would be no way to uphold the doctrine of the Trinity. This is not because the Son is the first in the order of the Trinity, but because it is the Son's generation that establishes "the relation between the first and second Persons." Gill here as elsewhere was careful to speak only of personal characteristics. In defining the intra-Trinitarian distinctions, his explanation referred only to the relative characteristics of the persons as opposed to the divine essence they share. Thus, Gill consistently structured his doctrine of generation according to the two ways of speaking about God.

Gill's assertion of the Son's eternal generation prompted him to explain how generation may be conceived as eternal. In doing so, Gill proposed that rather than thinking of eternal generation as a priority of time between the Father and Son, it should instead be thought of in terms of a priority of ordering. Thus, for Gill, eternal generation not only speaks to personal distinctions within the Godhead, but also of *taxis*.⁵⁰ While

⁴⁸ Gill calls it "the distinguishing criterion of the christian religion, and what gives it preference to all others, and upon which all the important doctrines of it depend; even upon the Sonship of Christ as a divine person; and as by generation, even eternal generation. Without this the doctrine of the Trinity can never be supported." Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 144.

⁴⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142.

⁵⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142, 144–45.

Gill did not develop his conception of *taxis* in any depth, it was a doctrine he clearly affirmed in his *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. As the nature of the Son's generation should be understood in terms of a "priority of order" between the Father and Son, so prayer, Gill explained, was directed to the Father by virtue of his priority in the divine order: "Now the reason why the address in prayer is generally made to him, though it may be made equally to either of the other two persons, is, because of the priority of order he has, though not of nature, in the deity."⁵¹ And, as Park has written, "although he does not develop his discussion on how the order of the Triune God is applied to His internal and external works, it is obvious that it becomes an ontological foundation on which his continuing discussion on the works of God such as election, covenant, creation, providence, redemption, salvation and so on are built."⁵²

Human and divine generation. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gill was careful to explain this difficult doctrine by instructing his readers how to think about generation with reference to God's nature. He contended that one cannot reason directly from "human to divine generation" without exercising great caution, the purpose of which was "to remove from our minds everything carnal and impure." Ideas that imply "an imperfection; as division of nature, multiplication of essence, priority and posteriority, motion, mutation, alteration, corruption, diminution, cessation from operation," must be excluded from any consideration of eternal generation. Eternal generation, according to Gill, is "hyperphysical or supernatural." Thus, "to reason from the one to the other, without limitation, restriction, care, and caution, is very unsafe and

⁵¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145, 943. Steven Tshombe Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 312–13.

⁵² Hong-Gyu Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)" (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2001), 249.

dangerous; since it may lead unwarens into foolish and hurtful errors.”⁵³ Gill’s cautions are not novel, but reveal his earnest attempts to avoid all forms of subordination in the Godhead as he defended the Son’s eternity, independence, and equality.⁵⁴

As Gill sought to uphold the full deity and eternality of the Son, he gleaned different insights from the analogy of human generation that could be applied to divine generation. One noticeable difference between Gill and Turretin on this point was that the latter thought a communication of nature was a legitimate point of comparison between human and divine generation and could, with proper qualifications, be applied to God. For Turretin, a communication of essence understood in accordance with God’s nature was central to his definition of the Son’s generation from the Father. Turretin explained it in this way:

As all generation indicates a communication of essence on the part of the begetter to the begotten (by which the begotten becomes like the begetter and partakes of the same nature with him), so this wonderful generation is rightly expressed as a communication of essence from the Father (by which the Son possesses indivisibly the same essence with him and is made perfectly like him). Whatever may be the analogy between natural and human generations, and the supernatural and divine, still the latter is not to be measured by the former or to be tried by them because they greatly differ (whether we consider the principle, the mode or the end). For in physical generation, the principle is not only active, but also passive and material; but in the divine it is only active. In the former, a communication is made not of the whole essence, but only of a part which falls and is alienated from the begetter. In the latter, the same numerical essence is communicated without decision and alienation. In the one, the produced is not only distinct but also separate from the begetter because the begetter generates out of himself terminatively. In the other, the begetter generates in himself and not out of himself. Thus the begotten Son (although distinct) still is never divided from him. He is not only of a like (*homoiousios*), but also of the same essence (*homoousios*).⁵⁵

While both Gill and Turretin cautioned their readers about wrongly attributing human characteristics to divine generation, Gill was unwilling to grant the analogy of

⁵³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

⁵⁴ Those arguments are found here: Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 147–49.

⁵⁵ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:292–93 [3.29.I, IV].

communication from human to divine generation. For Turretin, however, the idea of communication was an essential and explanatory point of comparison.

Calvinistic reasoning. Gill's defense of eternal generation against charges of subordinationism further illustrate his discontinuity with classical Trinitarianism on account of a communication of essence. With respect to generation and aseity, Gill's defense of the Son's independence and equality deserve further attention. His response to those who claimed that eternal generation implied dependence and inequality illustrated the role aseity played in his understanding of eternal generation. According to Gill, eternal generation implies no dependence, because with respect to being God, the Son is of himself, *autotheos*. Thus, Gill stated that the Son, "as all sound divines hold, is *αὐτόθεος*, God of himself, and independent of any other, though he is the Son of the Father." According to Gill, eternal generation thus only speaks to his personal relation with the Father, which reveals his distinct personality and order of priority. As God, however, he is "God of himself." For Gill, the Son does not depend on the Father for his deity—not even through a communication of essence—since he has the divine nature of himself. In this concise statement, Gill models his distinction between the two ways of speaking about God both personally and essentially. In terms of his person, he is begotten by the Father; in terms of his essence, he has it of himself. It is in Gill's elaboration of these truths that he highlighted the mutual-dependency between the two persons with respect to their distinct personality in order to further push back against notions of dependence. His explanation is worth repeating:

and as the distinct personality of the Son arises from his relation to Father as such, so the distinct personality of the Father arises from his relation to his Son as such; hence the distinct personality of the one, is no more dependent, than the distinct personality of the other; and both arise from their mutual relation to each other; and both arise and commence together, and not one before the other; and both are founded in eternal generation.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148, cf. 145.

Gill was thus accustomed to speak of God in both essential and relative terms. In so doing he avoided ideas of communication. For Gill this meant that speaking of the Son as God, he is of himself and independent. But speaking relatively of him as Son, he is “of the Father.” Nevertheless, the distinct personalities of each were dependent upon their relation to one another.⁵⁷

Unlike the classical account of eternal generation, in which the Son’s equality is affirmed through eternal generation, Gill based the Son’s equality in his divinity apart from any consideration of essential communication. For Gill, the Son is equal to God *simply because he is God*. Without any reference to the Son’s generation, Gill affirmed that the Trinitarian persons are equal to each other because each of them “subsists in perfect equality with one another.” Thus, with respect to generation, Gill instructed his readers that any notions of inequality between fathers and sons must be discarded of by virtue of the fact that Christ is “of the same nature, having the same perfections with [the Father.” While Gill was content to speak of subordination with respect to the Son’s role as Mediator and as the incarnate Lord, he did not allow it with reference to him as Son of God.⁵⁸ Therefore in his defense of the Son’s equality, similar to his defense of his independence, Gill’s focus was on the Son *as God*. His reasoning lacked the classical understanding of communication that allowed eternal generation to function in such a way to secure consubstantiality. Gill appears to reason similarly to Calvin by defending the Son’s independence and equality, based not on his divine nature communicated to him in generation, but in the divine nature he has of himself.

Generation of person. One place where Gill found continuity with classical Trinitarianism, and where he found positive correlation with human generation, was in his assertion that that eternal generation is the begetting of person, not essence. Gill

⁵⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148.

⁵⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148.

clearly articulated this view not only his theological works, but in his *Exposition of Scripture*. For instance, in his comments of Psalm 2:7, Gill defined generation as a reference to the *person* of the Son thus:

He is the true, proper, natural, and eternal Son of God, and as such declared, owned, and eternal Son of God . . . which act of begetting refers not to the nature, nor to the office, but the person of Christ' not to his nature, not to his divine nature, which is common with the Father and Spirit; wherefore if his was begotten, theirs must be also . . . but it has respect to his person; for, as in human generation, person begets person, and like begets like, so in divine generation; but care must be taken to remove all imperfection from it, such as divisibility and multiplication of essence, priority and posteriority, dependence, and the like: nor can the modus or manner of it be conceived or explained by us."⁵⁹

And in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* he stated similarly, “as in natural, so in divine generation, person begets person, and not essence begets essence.” This understanding of generation, for Gill, accorded with the nature of human generation. Not only that, it was consistent with the idea that all three divine persons share the essence in common. Speaking of generation in terms of person, not essence, preserved the unity and distinction within God necessary for upholding the doctrine of the Trinity. Gill pointed out that if one conceives of the Son’s essence as being generation, then “so would the divine nature of the Father, and of the Holy Ghost.” Furthermore, if the essence is understood to beget, “there would be more than one essence.”⁶⁰ Thus, as the Son’s mode of subsistence is to be begotten, he is begotten *with respect to his person*. Additionally, Gill’s view of the Son’s aseity was glimpsed where he elsewhere explained that unlike human generation, “God the Father begets a person existing by himself.”⁶¹ It is apparent from Gill’s above exposition of this idea that the generation of person does not entail a communication of essence. Where Turretin, as noted above, believed that the generation of person in human generation entailed communication, Gill did not derive this same idea

⁵⁹ John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1809–1810 ed. (repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 3:531.

⁶⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 148–49.

⁶¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

from the analogy of human generation. Thus, when speaking of the Son's generation, Gill spoke of the generation of his person which distinguished him from the Father in the essence they both equally possess together.

Gill understood eternal generation as an immanent act in God whereby the Father generates the *person* of the Son. It is an eternal act of God's life in himself that distinguishes the persons in the Godhead, which evinces the distinct personalities of the Father and Son that are mutually-dependent on one another. Gill knew these realities were beyond human comprehension and was satisfied to know as far as God had revealed, writing, "and as for the modus or manner of it, we must be content to be ignorant of it."⁶²

The Aseity of the Son

Gill's comments regarding the nature of God reveal his understanding of the aseity belonging to each person in the Godhead. Gill's opening chapter in *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* proved that God exists, which he contended "is the foundation of religion."⁶³ After a chapter on Scripture, Gill gave an account of God's names, concluding that he can be considered "the eternal, immutable, and almighty Being, the Being of beings, self-existent, and self-sufficient, and the object of religious worship and adoration."⁶⁴ He then moved into a chapter explaining the nature of God. As this dissertation has already mentioned, Gill believed the terms "nature" and "essence" were biblically warranted and synonymous in his use.⁶⁵ Although Gill believed that God is incomprehensible, he believed that "somewhat of it may be apprehended, but it cannot be fully comprehended." Thus, God's incomprehensibility does not preclude one from

⁶² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 142, 148, 157–58.

⁶³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 1.

⁶⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30.

⁶⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30.

learning about God's nature. Learning of God's nature, for Gill, was a necessary act for worship: "though we cannot have adequate ideas of God, yet we should endeavor to get the best we can, and frame the conceptions of him we are able; that so we may serve and worship him, honour and glorify him, in the best manner."⁶⁶ Gill set out three basic guidelines for understanding God's nature. First, all concepts of God as physical must be thrown aside. Second, "The description of God, as a Spirit, teaches us to ascribe to God all the excellencies to be found in spirits in a more eminent manner, and to consider them as transcendent and infinite in him." Third, God is a "simple and uncompounded Being, and does not consist in parts."⁶⁷

According to Gill, the divine essence must be ascribed equally to all three persons of the Godhead. This assertion, of course, was uncontroversial among orthodox Trinitarians. Gill, however, very clearly asserted the aseity of all three divine persons. Each person, then, must be understood to possess the essence of himself, *without respect to imminent procession*. Gill was emphatic on this point. Explaining how all three divine persons have the essence in common, Gill wrote,

[t]his nature is common to the three persons in God, *but not communicated from one to another*; they each of them partake of it, and possess it as one undivided nature; they all enjoy it; it is not part of it that is enjoyed by one, and a part of it by another, but the whole by each; as 'all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ,' so in the holy Spirit; and of the Father, there will be no doubt; these equally subsist in the unity of the divine essence, *and that without any derivation or communication of it from one to another*.⁶⁸

Much of what Gill asserted in this statement was affirmed by all Trinitarians. All affirmed that each person fully possesses the fullness of the divine nature. All affirmed that Father, Son, and Spirit each subsist in full equality in the divine essence. But, as this dissertation has so far demonstrated, not all were agreed as to the manner in which the

⁶⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 31.

⁶⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 31–34.

⁶⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30, emphasis mine.

essence is possessed by the three divine persons. Gill twice in this short excerpt denied a communication of essence from one divine person to another. For him, the essence is common in such a way that communication or derivation is unnecessary. Each fully partake of the essence of himself. Thus, the Son's distinct mode of subsistence does not define the manner by which he possesses his divine nature. Modes of subsistence distinguish the persons and establish their mutually-dependent personalities, but they do not establish their consubstantiality. Rather, each person—as a *divine* person—is *autotheos* and therefore exists of himself.

Gill, knowing the classical understanding of eternal generation, acknowledged that orthodox Trinitarians disagreed on this point: “I know it is represented by some, who, otherwise are sound in the doctrine of the Trinity, that the divine nature is communicated from the Father to the Son and Spirit, and that he is *fons Deitatis*, ‘the fountain of Deity.’” Nevertheless, he considered this way of speaking to be theologically problematic, arguing that these were “unsafe phrases; since they seem to imply a priority in the Father to the other two persons; for he that communicates must, at least in order of nature, and according to our conception of things, be prior to whom the communication is made; and that he has a superabundant plenitude of Deity in him, previous to this communication.” According to Gill, then, a communication of the essence was problematic because it seemed to suggest that the Father takes priority over the other persons. At the very least it implies a priority in ordering—a point to which Gill did not object—but he thought it also may suggest temporal ordering. One wonders why Gill did not attempt to explain the nature of communication similar to generation as a priority of order and not time, since he later in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* made this distinction. The danger of temporal ordering, however, was not the driving force—his doctrine of aseity was. Nevertheless, Gill certainly could not abide what he considered another possible entailment of these phrases—that one of the persons possesses the Deity in a greater measure than the others. Gill was not charging those who used phrases such

as “*fons Deitatis*” with heresy, since they are “sound in the doctrine of the Trinity.” Minimally, however, he thought these ways of speaking were potentially dangerous. For these reasons, Gill chose to understand the sharing of essence in the following way: “It is better to say, that they are self-existent, and exist together in the same undivided essence; and jointly, equally, and as early one as the other, possess the same nature.” In Gill’s mind, there was not one person who, in the personal ordering of the Trinity, makes the essence common to all three. There are simply three, who relate personally to one another in the essence, with each person possessing the essence of himself.⁶⁹

In his earlier *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill expressed the same sentiment:

Now when we call the Father the first person in the Trinity, we do not suppose that he is the first, in order of nature, time, or causality; as if the Father was *fons Deitatis*, the fountain of the Deity; expressions which some good men have made use of with no ill design: But since an ill use has been made of them, by artful and designing men, ‘tis time for us to lay them aside. As the Father is God of himself, so the Son is God of himself, and the Spirit is God of himself. They all three exist together, and necessarily exist, and subsist distinctly by themselves in one undivided nature. The one is not before the other, nor more excellent than the other.⁷⁰

The rule, for Gill, was that each person fully possesses the divine essence in all of its perfection—of himself—and this in the same manner. *Taxis*, and mode of subsistence, do not factor into their possession of the divine nature in any way. The personal relations are not considered with respect to how each person partakes of the essence. Each person, particularly considered as God, is God of himself. For Gill, neither the Son nor the Spirit have the divine nature bestowed upon them through any form of communicative action within the Godhead, regardless of how it is defined. As each person is God, so each person is God of himself.

Gill was committed to a “strict distinction” in his use of language pertaining to the persons and essence of God. His particular understanding of the personal distinctions and

⁶⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30–31. I am indebted to Dr. Tyler Wittman for introducing me to the language of communication in terms of “making the essence common.”

⁷⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 83–84.

consubstantiality of the Son fits him well among the “Reformed minority report.”⁷¹ Eternal generation was descriptive of the Son’s distinct mode of subsistence—his distinction as a *person* in the Godhead. For Gill, generation was, strictly speaking, the generation of *person*. It did not respect the manner in which the Son possessed the divine essence. Gill clearly articulated his position in a way that could not be misunderstood and in doing so expressed his belief that the Son’s generation was the generation of his person apart from the consideration of his divine nature, which, like the Father and Spirit, is *a se*.

“**[T]he fountain of life.**” One of the ways Gill sustained his view of aseity was by appealing to the economy of salvation in John 5:26, a text that had been classically interpreted in support of a communication of the essence in the *ad intra* life of God.⁷² In John 5:26, Jesus says, “For as the father hath life in himself . . . so hath he given to the son to have life in himself.”⁷³ Gill interpreted “life” in this verse as a reference to the promise of eternal life given to the Son as Mediator, which he then gives to those promised to him in the eternal covenant of grace. While Gill considered the interpretation that would understand “life” as that which belongs to the Father as an essential characteristic by which he gives life generally to all creatures, but thought it was better interpreted economically as the life of salvation. This “life,” then, is that which is “in his mind, his heart, his counsel, and his covenant, and in his hands, for all his chosen ones.”

⁷¹ Like Ellis, I want to affirm that this “strict distinction” does not imply that Classical Trinitarianism lacked “care and consistency in trinitarian speech.” Ellis, however, stated that he used the term “because I believe this last position avoided the particular tensions present in the other distinction approaches to this central bundle of doctrines.” The term “minority report” also comes from Ellis, which he says is “a ready label for those Reformed within the historical period under consideration who may be grouped together in their manner of employing Calvin’s autothean language, in contrast to the mainstream’s incorporation of Calvin’s views into a traditional understanding of divine procession.” To put a point on it, Ellis stated that “[t]his consistency is most apparent in the minority’s controversial demurral from the received explanation of the relationship between Trinity and Unity in God, as dependent upon the procession’s essentially communicative manner of divine procession.” Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 173–74.

⁷² Ellis states that it was used by both Peter Lombard and Robert Bellarmine. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 141.

⁷³ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:803, Gill’s translation.

For Gill, this grant of eternal life in the plan of salvation demonstrates the deity of Christ. In his words, it shows “that he and his father are one, though not in person, yet as in affection, will and power, so in nature and essence.” Having defined the “life” given from the Father in economic terms and asserted the Son’s deity with the Father, he explicitly cut off the possibility of interpreting this verse with reference to a communication of essence:

The son has life in himself, essentially, originally, and inderivatively as the father has, being equally the living God, the fountain of life, and donor of it, as he; and therefore this is not a life which he gives, or communicates to him; but eternal life is what the one gives, and the other receives, according to the economy of salvation settled between them: and hence it is, that all that hear Christ’s voice spiritually shall live eternally; for these words are a reason of the former and confirm the truth of them, as well as shew the equality of the son with the father, in that he is equal to such a trust, as to have eternal life committed to him.⁷⁴

Gill’s language can hardly be more direct: this passage cannot be speaking of a communication of essence, since the Son is “the living God, the fountain of life, and donor of it.” Mentioned in this verse, then, is that promise and plan of eternal life that was “settled” in the eternal covenant of grace, by which Christ gives life to the elect. It is this giving of life to those promised to Christ as Mediator that supports the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. While those within the classical Trinitarian camp interpreted John 5:26 as support for a communication of essence, Gill rejected this idea, arguing instead that it demonstrates that Christ as Mediator was given eternal life so that he may grant it to those promised to him in the eternal covenant of grace.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:803.

⁷⁵ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:803. Gill placed all of salvation in the context of the eternal covenant of grace, which he equated with what others have called the covenant of redemption. The following overview of Gill’s covenant of grace may serve to illumine the way in which he spoke of the economy of salvation, in which Christ is given eternal life to secure the salvation of those given to him in the covenant: “This covenant is the same with the covenant of grace; some divines, indeed, make them distinct covenants; the covenant of redemption, they say, was made with Christ in eternity; the covenant of grace with the elect, or with believers, in time: but this is very wrongly said; there is but one covenant of grace, and not two, in which the Head and Members, the Redeemer and the persons to be redeemed, Christ and the elect, are concerned; in which he is the Head and Representative of them, acts for them, and on their behalf. What is called a covenant of redemption, is a covenant of grace, arising from the grace of the Father, who proposed to his Son to be the Redeemer, and from the grace of the Son, who agreed to be so; and even the honours proposed to the Son in this covenant, redounded to the advantage of

Gill came to the same conclusion earlier in his *Exposition* of John 1:4, “In him was life,” by asserting the Son’s aseity and divine power to bestow life upon others: “There was life in the word with respect to himself; a divine life, the same with the life of the father and of the spirit; and is in him, not by gift, nor by derivation or communication; but originally, and independently, and from all eternity.” The Son, as God of himself, has the power to give life to others since “the fountain of natural life is in him, he is the efficient cause, and preserver of it.” Not only that, but in God the Son there is “spiritual” and “eternal life,” all of which “proves him to be the true God, and shews us where life is to be had.”⁷⁶ Again in this passage, Gill described the Son as *autotheos* and explicitly rejected the idea that the Son’s essence was communicated to him in generation or in any other way. He is God of himself and the giver of life to others.

Despite Gill’s rejection of essential communication and strong assertion of the Son’s aseity, his doctrine of eternal generation was criticized as a denial of the Son’s self-existence. John Allen (fl. 1740s–1790s), pastor in London of Petticoat Lane Baptist Church, called Gill’s doctrine of generation “the Pillar of *Arianism*,” arguing that it destroys the Son’s aseity. Allen thus wrote:

Can Omnipotence, or he that is the omnipresent GOD be begotten? Can the CREATOR be begotten? Can JEHOVAH Shallon, JEHOVAH Jireh, JEHOVAH Shammah be begotten? Can he that was without Beginning be begotten? Can he whose dwelling ever in Eternity be begotten, whose Nature is Glory, and whose

the elect; and the sum and substance of the everlasting covenant made with Christ is the salvation and eternal happiness of the chosen ones; all the blessings and grants of grace to them, are secured in that eternal compact; for they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, and had grace given them in him before the world was; wherefore there can be no foundation for such a distinction between a covenant of redemption in eternity, and a covenant of grace in time.” Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 217. See Fesko’s brief treatment, related to justification, in J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2016), 30–31. Richard Muller has also made a significant contribution to Gill studies on this particular doctrine. Richard A. Muller, “The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill’s Critique of the Pactum Salutis,” *Foundations* 24, no. 1 (March 1981): 4–14. Gill cross-referenced 1 John 5:11 in his exegesis of John 5:26, on which passage he commented that the life that is in the Son is “not only the purpose and promise of it, but that itself; Christ asked it of his father in the covenant of peace, and he gave it to him, that he might have it in himself for all his people; and here it is safe and secure, it is hid with Christ in God, it is bound up in the bundle of life with him; and because he lives, this life will never be lost, or they come short of it.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:656.

⁷⁶ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:740, Gill’s translation.

Name is the King eternal, &c. All these Questions must be answered before I dare believe it Or can God that has every divine Perfection and Glory in himself, and from himself, which the Hebrew Word I AM signifies, be begotten? Can that being which is in its own Essence from everlasting be begotten, or HE that could swear be no greater than himself, exist by Generation? . . . Yet so dark is this great Man in Israel, and so stubbornly confident in this Soul trembling Error, in denying the essential personal Glory of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, that he daringly says, and is frequently in his Preaching and Writing attempting to prove, that the Lord Jesus has no Existence as a divine Person; but as he is *begotten* by what he calls eternal Generation.⁷⁷

Apart from misunderstanding Gill’s doctrine of eternal generation, which this dissertation has presented, one catches a glimpse of the eighteenth-century environment in which Gill was writing, wherein the traditional Trinitarian terminology was eschewed and deemed destructive of the Son’s full deity.⁷⁸ Despite Gill’s open and direct rejection of a communication of essence, as well as other ideas of generation that may imply an inferiority of the Son to the Father in the divine nature, Gill’s use of traditional terms such as “eternal generation” was deemed spiritually dangerous.⁷⁹

As this chapter has proved, Gill understood all three divine persons as *autotheos*. Thus, their relative properties are not a mechanism, so to speak, through which they receive the essence. Each person, without mention of his personal relation, is God of himself. For this reason, Gill did not affirm a communication of essence in eternal generation. Nay, he straightforwardly rejected the idea. For Gill, eternal generation was that immanent and eternal act in God by which the persons relate to each other and by which they are distinguished. The Son’s generation was the begetting of person, “a person existing by himself.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ I am indebted to Michael A. G. Haykin for pointing me to this very lively writing. Haykin discusses Allen’s criticisms of Gill here: Michael A. G. Haykin, “Particular Baptist Trinitarianism in the Long Eighteenth Century—with Special Reference to John Gill” (unpublished paper, 2016), 13–16. [John Allen], *The Spirit of Liberty: Or, Junius’s Loyal Address. Being a Key to the English Cabinet: Or, an Humble Dissertation upon the Rights and Liberties of the Ancient Britons. . . . By Junius, Junior. To Which Is Added, a Polemical Tale; or, the Christians Winter Piece: . . .* ([London?], 1770), 88–89.

⁷⁸ See more on this below. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:331–32

⁷⁹ [Allen], *The Spirit of Liberty*, 91, 95. Cf. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

⁸⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

Aseity in Context

The second chapter of this dissertation outlined the anti-Trinitarianism that pervaded seventeenth and eighteenth-century England. Certainly, Gill's strong affirmations of both the Son's deity and distinct personal subsistence were crucial for preserving the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in this context. But how does one account for Gill's particular expression of the Son as *autotheos* in contrast to so much of church history and the majority of the Reformed orthodox? Was Gill following anyone in particular in his rejection of essential communication? To begin with the latter question, Gill did read Calvin and likely would have been aware of the intramural Reformed discussion related to his *αὐτόθεος* claims. Gill clearly understood that his *αὐτόθεος* doctrine was common when he wrote that "all sound divines hold" to the Son as *αὐτόθεος*.⁸¹ His particular use of the term may well be an instance of direct influence from Calvin, despite the fact that Gill leaned more heavily on the post-Reformation Protestant scholastics and despite the fact that Calvin himself did not directly reject the idea that the Son's essence is communicated in eternal generation. Direct influence, however, is unnecessary, since, as Muller has claimed, "if citations of sources provide the rule for determining antecedents, Calvin does not occupy even an insignificant place in Gill's theological background. Calvin's influence is present only as a formative force in the broad Reformed tradition to which Gill looked for inspiration."⁸² Nevertheless, since Gill did not directly cite Calvin in any of the places explored for this research, the exact nature of Calvin's influence cannot be definitively known. Neither can the direct influence of any other theologian be definitively known since Gill cited no other source for his view of aseity as it relates to eternal generation. Regardless, viewing Calvin's

⁸¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148.

⁸² Richard A. Muller, "John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 53–54.

influence as indirect, however, “as a formative force in the broad Reformed tradition,” is indisputable based on Calvin’s influence among the Reformed and Gill’s knowledge of the literature and use of the term *ἀπόθεος*.

There is, however, at least one Reformed theologian considered among the Reformed minority report that could have been a source of his ideas: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644).⁸³ Maccovius was a student of Keckermann (also among the Reformed minority report), whom Gill cited favorably in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* and from whom Gill may have received the term “hyperphysical” to describe the nature of eternal generation.⁸⁴ Maccovius, whose expression of the two ways of speaking about God personally and essentially appear to have derived from Calvin and Keckermann, believed that as an “integral hypostasis,” the Son was begotten immanently in God. Similar to Gill, this immanent generation for Maccovius “does not undermine but rather reinforces the equality and mutuality of the persons in their eternal relation.” Ellis explains Maccovius’ thinking thus: “Just as ‘God of God’ means ‘God the Son from God the Father,’ affirming the Son to be *a se* does not identify any characteristic unique to his *person*. Nor is ‘God the Son’ an identification of the essence with respect to itself, but in this particular mode of subsistence—an integral divine hypostasis.” For Maccovius, the Son’s “possession of deity uncommunicatedly” did not preclude the idea that his personal subsistence was from the Father (his eternal generation from the Father). Ellis explains

⁸³ Muller lists Maccovius among the sources of Gill’s theology. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition,” 53

⁸⁴ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 189. Gill cited Maccovius three times in his chapter on justification and once in his chapter on Christ as covenant Surety. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 204, 206, 207, 239. For a reference to Maccovius’ term “hyperphysical,” see Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 94n70. Maccovius applied this term to eternal generation in his *Loci Communes*, which Gill cited in the references listed above. Johannes Maccovius, *Loci Communes Theologici: Ex Omnibus Ejus, Quæ Extant, Collegiis, Thesibus per Locos Comm. Disputatis, Manuscriptis Antiquis, Recentioribus, Undiquaque Sollicite Conquisitis, Collecti, Digesti, Aucti, Indice Capitum, Rerumque Locupletati*, ed. Nicolai Arnoldi (Amsterdami: Apud Ludovicum & Danielem Elzevirios, 1658), 9. While Gill did not cite Maccovius when using this term, one can find him employing it here: Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146. Ellis provided an outline of three “Reformed minority report” thinkers: Lucas Trelcatius, Bartholomæus Keckerman, and Johannes Maccovius. See his introduction to and exposition of their views here: Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 173–94.

Maccovius' rationale: "This is because originated subsistence and possession of essence belong respectively to these two apposite (not opposite!) ways of speaking of God the Son—he is irreducibly God, irreducibly Son."⁸⁵ As in the case of Calvin, Maccovius' influence on Gill cannot be definitively determined, although his understanding of generation, aseity, and description of eternal generation as "hyperphysical" in the *Loci Communes*—which Gill cited in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*—suggests the possibility.

Gill, however, realized that he at least spoke differently than some otherwise trusted theologians when he rejected the term *fons Deitatis*. A specific precedent for this rejection is more difficult to discern, although Gill's reason for doing so is not. The influential subordinationist theology of Samuel Clarke, for instance, provides a foil for Gill's doctrine of the aseity of the divine persons. As mentioned in chapter 2, Clarke believed in the ontological supremacy of the Father and thus taught a subordinationist view of the Son. For Clarke, interpreting the Son as "The Self-existent Being" was "downright Sabellianism."⁸⁶ Only the Father is "is absolutely Supreme, Self-existent, and Independent."⁸⁷ By contrast, the Son "is not Self-existent, but derives his Being or Essence, and all his attributes, from the Father, as from the Supreme Cause."⁸⁸ While both Clarke and Gill did not believe the essence was communicated (although for difference reasons), Gill's strong statements against derivation directly contradicted those of Clarke. While Clarke believed the Son was dependent and received his existence from the Father, Gill believed that the Son—the same as both the Father and Spirit—is self-existent. As God, he is God of himself. While Clarke rejected a communication of essence because he tied the attributes to the person of the Father, Gill tied the attributes to

⁸⁵ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 190–92, 194.

⁸⁶ Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity: In Three Parts: Wherein All the Texts in the New Testament Relating to That Doctrine, and the Principle Passages in the Liturgy of the Church of England, Are Collected, Compared, and Explained* (London: James Knapton, 1712), 99.

⁸⁷ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 245.

⁸⁸ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 270.

God's nature and thought that Trinitarian personal modes of subsistence were incommunicable.⁸⁹ Gill rejected the language of communication because he believed it could imply untrue things of God, namely, that one of the persons was before the others or had the divine essence in greater measure than the other persons.⁹⁰ While this was not the classical view, one can see how these terms could be understood in a subordinationist theology such as Clarke's (despite the fact that Clarke did not believe in communication but used stronger language such as "derivation"). Second, Gill's doctrine of divine aseity was such that each person possesses the divine essence of himself. Thus, as fully God of himself, it was simply unnecessary in Gill's mind to speak of the Son receiving the essence from the Father in any way, whether through language of "communication" or "derivation."⁹¹ Thus, Gill's specific way of speaking about the Son's generation and aseity may be seen as both a reaction to eighteenth-century subordinationist theologies such as Clarke's and as an appropriation of the Reformed minority report's manner of understanding the Son's eternal generation.

One of the reasons Ellis gives for "the eclipse of the minority report" view was that it became associated with Röell, who denied "personal processions." Ellis explains his reasoning, thus:

Although Röell's position was quite different from the minority view in both assumptions and conclusions, the mainstream Reformed felt his rejection of the personal processions was logically entailed in any rejection of essential communication. Because of their similar criticism of essential communication, those who followed Calvin's view closely, despite consistent affirmation of the reality and

⁸⁹ Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, 245. In the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill stated that the divine nature is communicable. In this sense Gill intends that the divine nature is able to be shared by all three Trinitarian persons. Thus, while the essence is communicable, it is not communicated to the Son *through generation from the Father*. As the essence is communicable, each persons has it in common with the others. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 48–49.

⁹⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30–31.

⁹¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 30–31, 148.

importance of the divine processions and immanent taxis, were classed with Röell and those who denied these themes *carte blanche*.⁹²

The result of this association, Ellis describes, was that “[b]y the turn of the eighteenth century, according to mainstream reckoning the Calvinian Reformed minority account as I have described it here did not represent a distinct approach at all.” According to Ellis, Röell’s view created a “double-edged consequence,” leading to either entrenchment or innovation:

The arrival of Röell’s position on the scene during a tumultuous time in the Reformed tradition’s history thus carried a critical double-edged consequence for the minority report: it helped to motivate the increasingly entrenched mainstream to continue to solidify its position, and it garnered the support of an ever-larger number of those who for one reason or another were unsatisfied with the adequacy of persuasiveness of traditional Reformed formulation for the exigencies of a new age and its novel approaches to exegesis, philosophy, and theology. Both edges of this response to the Röellian approach, together with the other factors just mentioned, effectively cut down the minority position as a workable and acceptable account of God’s triunity. Before it had a chance to take root and to flower, the environment within which the Reformed minority approach was to grow up had become inhospitable. A critical consequence of this is that the only approach to trinitarian formulation which did not assume that *personal procession fundamentally means essential communication*—from the traditionalists to the radicals—went into eclipse.⁹³

As this chapter has shown, Gill serves as an example of the Reformed minority report. As an eighteenth-century figure, Gill avoided the “double-edged consequence” of Röell—whom Gill himself openly opposed on the doctrine of eternal generation. By rejecting the idea of a communication of essence, Gill distinguished himself from the classical approach to the doctrine of eternal generation. But by affirming the traditional Trinitarian terminology of eternal generation, he distinguished himself from theologians such as Thomas Ridgley who had discarded it.⁹⁴ On this issue, both Gill’s traditionalism and independence are manifest.⁹⁵ While Gill refused to give up the basic grammar and

⁹² Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 196.

⁹³ Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 196.

⁹⁴ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:331–32.

⁹⁵ Muller has previously recognized Gill “as a highly independent thinker in a relative sense.” Referring to Gill’s wide but “selective” use of non-Baptist sources, he wrote: “he was able to exert a degree

categories by which the Trinity had come to be articulated and understood, he nevertheless was unafraid of contradicting the mainstream when he deemed it necessary to remain biblical. His desire to defend and preserve the doctrine of the Trinity against eighteenth-century anti-Trinitarianism to some degree prompted him to display his independent-mindedness by asserting a less-established doctrine of the Son's eternal generation. Thus his Trinitarianism shows signs of genuine creativity, showing that Gill was not deterred from disagreeing with the tradition he so strongly appreciated.⁹⁶

Conclusion

John Gill's doctrine of the Son's aseity prevented him from understanding eternal generation as a communication of the divine essence. For Gill, eternal generation is an immanent act in the Godhead by which the persons are distinguished, and from which their distinct relations and personalities arise. It is a begetting of person, not essence. In Gill's view of divine aseity, each Trinitarian person of the Godhead possesses the fullness of the divine essence of himself, including the Son. This aseity excludes any notion of a communication of the essence in eternal generation. Thus, as a divine being, the Son may be considered the fountain of life, the same as the Father. With regard to aseity and its connection to eternal generation, Gill was part of a minority camp. In order to avoid any hint of subordination within the Trinity, Gill articulated Calvin's understanding of the Son as *autotheos* with even greater directness and clarity, claiming him to be the *Fons Deitatis* as the Father in order to avoid any hint of subordinationism.

of independence over against even his most trusted sources in order to position himself within the Particular Baptist tradition and in the context of the problems and debates confronting theology in the mid-eighteenth century." Muller, "John Gill and the Reformed Tradition," 55–56. Malcolm Yarnell highlights Gill's "intellectual independence," although explaining his assessment of Gill and his doctrine of the universal priesthood somewhat negatively. Malcolm Yarnell III, *John Locke's "Letters of Gold": Universal Priesthood and the English Dissenting Theologians, 1688–1789*, Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies Occasional Papers 15 (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2017), 27, 31.

⁹⁶ These comments on Gill's independence and creativity are indebted to conversation with Michael A. G. Haykin. The last sentence is taken almost verbatim from my discussion notes.

In doing so, Gill planted his flag alongside the few post-Reformation thinkers who held to eternal generation without a communication of essence.

CHAPTER 5

THE ETERNALLY BEGOTTEN WORD OF GOD

John Gill's theology of the divine Word had ramifications for his understanding of the immanent and economic Trinity. Basing the origin of this divine name on the apostle John's interpretation of the Old Testament, Gill applied the significance of the second person's identification as the divine Word to the doctrine of eternal generation and the Son's work *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Gill inherited his doctrine of the Logos from the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists that was later developed by Augustine, Aquinas, and then incorporated into Reformed orthodox theology in varying modes and to varying degrees. Gill's understanding of the Logos is largely consistent with its development throughout church history, although his use closely resembles other Reformed thinkers who minimally reflected on the analogy. In following this tradition, he explained the Logos with an analogy of the mind. In its most basic form, this analogy considered the Son as both the inward word or thought (Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and the spoken word (Λόγος προφορικός). The Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος illustrated the Son's eternal generation and the Λόγος προφορικός his *ad extra* work in the economy of salvation. Gill closely connected the Logos to biblical texts that spoke of the Son as the image, brightness, and Wisdom of the Father. These analogies, names, and images were mutually defining in their revelation of the Son's generation from the Father. Gill based the theological implications of the Logos in Scripture, most notably the Gospel of John, and argued that this name revealed the Son's deity, eternity, and distinct personality. His understanding of the Logos, then, allowed him to defend the Son's eternal generation from both Socinianism and Sabellianism. According to Gill, the economic implications of this name included the Son's role in the eternal council and covenant of grace and his co-efficient

work in speaking creation into existence. As the Word, the Son was not only spoken of in the Old Testament, but as the interpreter of the Father's mind, he knows the Father's mind and has revealed it throughout all ages, most definitively in the incarnation. As the divine Word, the Son is a priestly mediator who intercedes on behalf of his elect. In sum, Gill believed that the identity of the Son as the Logos bore witness to the nature of his generation from the Father as well as his creating and saving work.

The Identity of the Word

As this dissertation has demonstrated, seventeenth and eighteenth-century England saw a rise in anti-Trinitarian theology that required constant attention. Gill's first publication on the Trinity, his 1731 *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, provided a robust biblical and theological defense of the Trinity against both Sabellianism and Socinianism. In this work, Gill concentrated much of his efforts on the doctrine of the Son. Out of the book's nine chapters, Gill devoted four to the Son. In the first of these four chapters, Gill introduced the identification of the second person as the Word, referring to this designation as a "name, appellation, or character." Gill generally treated this identifier as a name that revealed particular characteristics of the second person (to be described below). He believed the identification of the divine person to whom this name belongs was easily determined in Scripture. In the writings of the apostle John, Gill noted that this is a frequent name given to the Son, which "declare the Deity, and Eternity of the Word; his co-existence with God" (John 1:1), as well as "his being a distinct person from him" (1 John 1:2). Gill believed that the "Word" in John 1:14 was a clear reference to the Son. He highlighted the use of this name in John's other writings, including his first epistle (1 John 1:1; 5:7) and Revelation (1:2; 14:13). It is the second person, the Son of God, who is also the Word of God.¹

¹ John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc'd into the Form of a Treatise*, 2nd ed. (Southwark, England: George Keith, 1752), 84–86. This same discussion can also be found in his sermon, "Paul's Farewell

It was crucial to establish the meaning of this divine name since at least one highly influential author, Samuel Clarke, had incorporated it into his subordinationist view of the Son. While Gill did not cite Clarke, or any other opponent on this point directly, it is likely that Gill had Clarke's or similar views in mind when he addressed this issue. It may also explain the reason he devoted an entire chapter to this divine name. Clarke rejected a Trinitarian understanding of the "Word" in John 1:1 as polytheism: "That the Word was Another Self-existent, Underived, Independent Person, co-ordinate to Him with whom he was: And This is the Impiety of Polytheism; subverting That First and Great Foundation of All Religion both Natural and Revealed, the Unity of GOD." Clarke instead argued that the Son is a person whose being was derived from the Father and who received "divine" attributes in a way unexplainable by human wisdom. He cited both Origen and Eusebius as authorities in his favor: "that the Word is a Person, deriving from the Father (with whom he existed before the World was,) both his Being it self, and incomprehensible Power and Knowledge, and other divine Attributes and Authority, in a Manner not revealed, and which humane Wisdome ought not to presume to be able to explain: And This is the Interpretation of the Learnedest and most Antient Writers in the Primitive Church."² Contrary to Clarke's convictions, Gill, in his chapter on the Word or Logos, as well as in other relevant areas of his writings, consistently applied this name to the Son consistent with his Trinitarianism. In doing so he articulated and defended the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation against both Sabellianism and Socinianism.³

Discourse at Ephesus, on Acts 20:32." John Gill, *Sermons and Tracts*, 1814 ed. (repr., Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, 1999), 4:162–63. Gill made very similar comments in his exposition of John 1:1. John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1809–1810 ed. (repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 7:737.

² Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity: In Three Parts: Wherein All the Texts in the New Testament Relating to That Doctrine, and the Principle Passages in the Liturgy of the Church of England, Are Collected, Compared, and Explained* (London: James Knapton, 1712), 86.

³ My assessment of Gill on this point has been illumined by Gilles Emery's work on Thomas Aquinas. See more below, specifically footnote 55.

The Origin of the Name

Gill devoted significant attention to the origin of this name and considered multiple options for determining it. In the end, he believed that the apostle John used the name based upon the teaching of the Old Testament.

Plato

Gill provided two different views held by some concerning the origin of this name, both based on the thought of Plato. The first view suggested that John “took it out of the writings of *Plato*.” This idea came from the Platonic philosopher, Amelius, who claimed that John’s writings were in accord with Plato’s philosophy of the Logos. The second view suggested that John used this name as a rhetorical strategy towards Ebion and Cerinthus, who were familiar with Plato’s philosophy and did not favor the designation, “Son of God.” Gill’s conclusion from these considerations, however, was that “it is much probable, that *Plato* had his notions of the Word out of the scriptures, than that *John* should this phrase out of his writings, or any of his followers.”⁴ Gill’s belief that some of Plato’s ideas that resembled the Trinity were influenced by Judaism was common among the Reformed.⁵

Targums

A more likely option than those above, Gill thought, was “that *John* took the expression [Logos] out of the Jewish *Targums*.”⁶ Whether or not this was actually the

⁴ Gill listed two reasons for this: “’tis certain that *Plato* travelled into *Egypt*, to get learning and knowledge; where, it is very probably, he met with the Jewish writings, out of which he collected his best things. And *Numenius*, a Pythagoric philosopher, accuses him of stealing what he wrote concerning God and the World, out of the books of *Moses*. Hence, he used to say, ‘What is *Plato*, but *Moses* in a Grecian dress.’” Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 87.

⁵ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:159–69.

⁶ Gill’s extensive knowledge of Jewish literature was well known. See John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (1838; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2006), 57–59. For a contemporary discussion on the use of Targum’s in the Gospel of John, see Ronning, who argues that the apostle John “was influenced by the Targums,” which was “a way of identifying him with the God of Israel.” He argues that John’s motives are both Christological and apologetic. As a Christological motive, the identification “is only a means to an end. That end is to identify Jesus as both

case, Gill continued in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* to demonstrate the agreement between the Targums and John's writings. Examining a variety of sources, Gill argued that the Targums were consistent with the apostle John's writings concerning the deity, distinct personhood, eternity of the Word, as well as his work in creation, his association with the name "Light," and the incarnation.⁷ The similarity between John and these Jewish sources was summarized by Gill when he wrote, "From the whole it is manifest, that there is great likeness between what the evangelist *John*, and these Jewish writers say of the Word. And whether he borrowed the phrase from them or no, yet it is plain that he expressed the traditional sense of his nation."⁸

Prior to moving to Gill's next consideration, it should be noted that in at least two places Gill left the choices for the origin of the Word to the above two proposals. In both his sermon, "Paul's Farewell Discourse at Ephesus," on Acts 20:32, and his exposition of John 1, Gill did not propose the Old Testament as the direct source for this name. Rather, in both of these places, he suggested that John took this name from its use in the Targums. The Targums were clearly Gill's choice in his sermon, "Now the reason why John makes use of this name, seems to be, because it was well known to the Jews, being frequently used in their *Targums*."⁹ After going through the same arguments above, and some in greater detail, Gill concluded in his commentary on the Gospel of John, "wherefore it is more probable, that the evangelist received this phrase of the word, as a

fully God and fully human." As an apologetic, this identification is "a way of appealing to his Aramaic-speaking Jews who have survived the destruction of Jerusalem." John L. Ronning, *The Jewish Targums and John's Logos Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 1, 43–44.

⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 87–93. Gill's qualification regarding their understanding of the incarnation should be noted. Gill clarified, "[n]ow these Jewish writers speak of the Word after this manner, either on the account of his appearances in an human form, under the Old Testament-dispensation, or on the account of his future incarnation, which John could speak of as past" (p. 92).

⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 93, emphasis original. John Owen wrote similarly in his massive Hebrews commentary, "[n]ow at this time there was nothing more common or usual, among the Hebrews, than to denote the *second subsistence in the Deity* by the name of 'the Word of God.'" John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations*, vol. 4, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 20 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 354, emphasis original.

⁹ Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:163, emphasis original.

divine person, from the Targums, where there is such frequent mention made of it; or however, there is a very great agreement between what he and these ancient writings of the Jews say of the word, as will be hereafter shown.” He added that Philo used this expression, “from whence it is manifest, that the name was well known to the Jews, and may be the reason of the evangelist’s using it.”¹⁰

The absence of a third option in these writings suggests that at an earlier point, Gill did not have a firm conviction of its viability. It is possible, given the dates of his *Exposition of the New Testament*¹¹ and “Paul’s Farewell Discourse at Ephesus,”¹² that he composed these prior to the completion of his first edition of *The Doctrine of the Trinity* in 1731. Furthermore, his second edition of the *Doctrine of the Trinity* in 1752 remained the same on this issue. To further this point, when Gill finished the sections on the Trinity in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, he reflected back upon his earlier *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and wrote that “upon a late revisal of the piece, I see no reason to retract any thing I have written, either as to sense of expressions; save only, in a passage or two of Scripture, which *then* did not stand so clear in my mind, as proofs of the eternal generation of the Son of God.”¹³ From this I gather that the final, third option, which Gill provided in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, was the one he ultimately settled upon.¹⁴

¹⁰ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:738.

¹¹ The *Exposition* was printed in 1746–1748 in three volumes. It is possible that Gill had preached this material much earlier, but had not gone back and changed his text when it was finally published. Rippon, *Memoir*, 58–59.

¹² This sermon appears to be one of those mentioned by Rippon, when he wrote of Gill’s *The Doctrine of the Trinity* that it “was the substance of several discourses delivered on that subject at his Wednesday evening lecture, and published at the request of the society.” A large portion of the material of this sermon was included in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. Rippon, *Memoir*, 37. Compare the following passages in Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:162–71, with Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 84–103.

¹³ Rippon, *Memoir*, 37. John Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, 1839 ed. (repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 171.

¹⁴ Regardless of the difference between Gill’s earlier proposal, that John took this name from the Targums, and his later proposal, that he took it from the Old Testament, it seems that Gill thought the Targums, on many occasions, provided faithful interpretations of the Old Testament. In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, he

The Old Testament

The third option stated by Gill in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* was that the Son's designation as "Word" was taken from John's interpretation of the Old Testament.¹⁵ One reason, although unlikely, for Gill's addition of a third option could have been attacks on the dating of the Targums and interpretations that contravened Gill's thesis of consistency between the Targums and John. In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill explained that "A Socinian writer, in order to shew that *John* did not take Λόγος from the *Targums*, endeavors to prove them to be of a later date than they are thought to be; about which, we need not be much concerned; and also, that by the Word they never intend a reasonable Person, subsisting by himself; which the instances already produced confute: To which more might be added, was it requisite. But there is no need to say that *John* borrowed this phrase from the Jewish *Targums*." Instead, Gill proposed that John was influenced by the Old Testament.¹⁶ Making explicit that John's use of Logos as a name for the Son, and the theology that derived from it, was ultimately from the Old Testament allowed Gill to pass over any controversy regarding the Targums. Proving their dates and consistency with

presented the similarity between the Targums, Philo, and John, with an apparent assumption that these Jewish texts correctly interpreted the Old Testament—at least with respect to the Logos. There may be instances where he disagreed with the Targums' use of Logos, but it appears Gill thought that they in large measure accurately represented the meaning of the Old Testament. Thus, claiming that John was influenced by the Targums was something of an indirect claim that the idea of the Logos ultimately derived from the Old Testament. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 87–93. For a clear occasion where Gill agreed with the Targums, see his discussion of Genesis 1:27 in *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and his *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* on Genesis 1:27 and John 1:3. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 90. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:11; 7:739–740. Furthermore, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* was written in a polemical context. Listing all of the possible positions in the clear context of anti-Trinitarian opposition made more sense in this occasional piece than it did in a sermon or commentary (which probably derived from a sermon). That is not to say, however, that Gill was not polemical in these latter two contexts. He was to varying degrees. Rather, it is to argue that *The Doctrine of the Trinity* is an inherently polemical document, whereas his sermons and commentaries were not.

¹⁵ "But there is no need to say that John borrowed this phrase from the Jewish Targums; but . . . from the scriptures of the Old Testament." Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 93.

¹⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 93.

Scripture was unnecessary, since Gill believed John's idea of the Word was derived from the Old Testament anyway.¹⁷

Gill based this assertion upon the apostle John's statement that all things were made by the Word, which Gill interpreted as a creation text, where God "no less than eight times . . . said, 'Let it be so, and it was so.'"¹⁸ Gill corroborated this assertion by appealing to its "perfect agreement" with Psalm 33:6, "by the word of the Lord were the heavens made."¹⁹ The "word" given in this passage, Gill believed, was a reference to Christ, "the essential Word of God." Gill recognized "word" as a common name for the Son, pointing to its use elsewhere in Scripture (John 1:1, 14; Heb 4:12; 1 John 5:7; Rev 19:13). He also thought the name "very fitly agrees with him," whom Gill described as the one

who spoke for all his people in the council and covenant of grace, and undertook to be their surety; is the Word spoken of by all the holy prophets since the beginning of the world; is the interpreter of his Father's mind and will, of which he must be capable, since he lay in his bosom; and now he speaks for his saints in heaven whose advocate he is; and especially he may be so called because he so often spake on the six days of creation, and said, let this and the other thing be, and it was so; and to him, as the Word of God, is the creation of all things frequently ascribed, John i. 1–3. Heb xi. 3. 2 Pet. iii. 5. and particularly the heavens, Heb 1. 10.²⁰

Other texts reveal Gill's interpretive tendency towards identifying the Son in the Old Testament identified as the Word. Gill mentioned 2 Samuel 7:21, cross-referenced with 1 Chronicles 17:19, Haggai 2:4,5, and Psalm 107:20, where he argued that "word" intends a divine person.²¹ John, then, used it in the same way as these authors

¹⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 93–94.

¹⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 93.

¹⁹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:663, Gill's translation.

²⁰ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:663.

²¹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 94. In his interpretation of Psalm 107:20 ("He sent his word, and healed them"; Gill's translation), he explained that "[t]his is true of Christ the essential Word, who was sent in the fulness of time, and was made flesh and dwelt among men, and went about healing all manner of diseases among the people; and who is also the physician of souls who came with healing in his wings; that is, with pardon of sin, for which his blood was shed: he is the only physician, the skillful, universal, and infallible one, and does all freely, and in a most marvelous manner, by his stripes, blood and

by applying the “Word” to the Son. In the case of 2 Samuel 7:21, David’s prayers to God in response to his gracious promises refer to the word, or Messiah, “that should spring from him; the Memra, as the Targum, the essential Word of God.”²² Gill showed that this paired well with the Septuagint translation and also its parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 17:19: “and so the Septuagint version, *because of thy servant*, with which agrees the parallel text in 1 Chron. 17:19.” Thus, his interpretation was that in David’s prayer to the Lord, David stated that it was for the Messiah to come through him (the Word) that these promises were made.²³ Taking these examples, then, Gill concluded that John referred to the second person as the Word based on Old Testament precedent. Gill’s comments on the creation narrative, and of other Old Testament texts, reveal his understanding of the revelation of the Trinity in both the Old and New Testaments. In one sense, the revelation of the Word in the New Testament is not a new revelation at all. The second person of the Trinity was known throughout the Old Testament as the Word, who was revealed with greater clarity in the New Testament.²⁴

Apostolic Usage

Gill’s interpretation of other New Testament texts was consistent with his interpretation Old Testament texts in which he thought the Word of God was a reference

wounds, and by an application of these to diseased persons sensible of their case.” He wrote that while this text is true of Christ, the Word who came in the flesh, it may also be applied to the gospel, which he characterized as “the doctrine of remission of sins by the blood of Christ, and by it Christ speaks peace and pardon to wounded consciences.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:171.

²² “Memra” is Aramaic for “word.” Ronning, *The Jewish Targums and John’s Logos Theology*, 13.

²³ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 2:594. A final suggestion for the origin of the name is suggested by Gill, that some have interpreted Christ in John 5:38 as referring to himself, in which case “*John* might take it immediately from him.” Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 94, emphasis original.

²⁴ Gill’s interpretation of Hebrews 1:1–3 (see the heading “Λόγος προφορικός: Interpreter of the Mind” below) substantiated the progressive nature of revelation being fully and finally given through the incarnation of Christ.

to the second person of the Trinity.²⁵ Gill argued that the Son was called the Word by Luke (1:2), Paul (Acts 20:32; Heb 4:12–13), and Peter (3 Pet 3:5).²⁶ His exegesis of Acts 20:32, to take his most thorough example, reveals his thinking on the matter. Gill wrote that in “taking his farewell of the elders of the church at *Ephesus*, he commends them to God, and to the Word of his grace: Where, by the Word of his grace, I understand not the gospel, or written word, but Jesus Christ, who is full of grace and truth.” Gill adopted this interpretation through theological reasoning, invoking biblical patterns, theological principles, and by comparing the statements in the passage to both the Scriptural word and Christ. Basing his interpretation on biblical patterns and theological principles, Gill argued that “saints never commend themselves, or others . . . to any but a divine Person,” and that “none but a divine Person is capable of taking the care and charge of the saints, and of making the same good.” Building again from theological principles, he contended that putting “the written word upon a level with a divine Being, does not appear very agreeable.” Noting another pattern, he wrote, “[t]he saints are never said to be committed or commended to the gospel; but that to them.”²⁷ And lastly, taking into account the context of the passage and the character of the second person and the written Word, Gill concluded that the essential Word—the Son—fits better in this context. He explained this conclusion by reasoning that “[t]hough the gospel is an instrument in the hands of the Spirit, in building up saints in their most holy faith; yet Christ is the great master builder; it is he that builds the temple, and must bear the glory. Though the gospel may be as a map, which shews us where our inheritance lies, and which is the way unto it; yet it is Christ who give it us, and puts us into the possession of it: It is in; by, or through him,

²⁵ Gill did not, however, think that every reference to “word” in the Old Testament was a reference to the Son. For instance, see Gill’s chapter on Scripture in *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 11–25.

²⁶ His full treatment of these passages can be found here: Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 94–101. See his abbreviated discussion in his sermon on Acts 20:32. Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:163–67.

²⁷ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 95–96.

that we obtain the inheritance.”²⁸ When interpreting Hebrews 4:12–14, Gill argued similarly, noting that the context and characterization of the “word” mentioned in the passage was better suited to Christ, the essential Word, rather than the written word.²⁹

In sum, Gill argued that the apostle John’s use of “Word” was not taken from the writings of Plato. Rather, it was more likely that Plato received his ideas from the Old Testament. Nor did this name come from the Jewish Targums, although in these and other Jewish writings there is great similarity. Rather, this name was based upon John’s reading of the Old Testament. The appearance of the “Word” at various points in the Old and New Testaments together provided Gill with a divinely revealed thread, leading to the second person of the Trinity.

The Eternally Begotten Word of God

While Gill did not believe eternal generation involved a communication of essence from the Father to the Son, he thought the Son’s designation as Word helped define the nature of the Son’s eternal generation from the Father. Ultimately, this divine name provided Gill further revelation with which to explain the Son’s distinct mode of subsistence and understand his work in the economy of salvation. Gill’s understanding of the Son as the Word followed the Christian tradition, emerging with the Apostolic Fathers and second-century Apologists, that believed the Son was both *Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος*, God’s internal and essential Word, as well as *Λόγος προφορικός*, God’s Word spoken or interpreted.

²⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 97. Gill’s argumentation on this point was similar in his sermon on Acts 20:32, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, and his exposition of the same passage. In his exposition of Acts, he concluded by writing that this “suits well with Christ the essential word: and who may be called the word of grace, because the grace of God is greatly displayed in him; and because all fulness of grace dwells in him; and he is the author, donor, and object of all grace, and so a proper person to be commended to; and what follows is very applicable to him.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:342. See the similarity of argumentation in his sermon here: Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:162–67.

²⁹ See Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 97–99. Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:163–65. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:396–97.

Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος: The Essential Word

Gill understood that the name, Word, or Logos, indicated something about the eternal nature of the Son. And, like other theologians before him, he found the analogy of the mind helpful for achieving further understanding of the Son's distinct mode of subsistence. For Gill, the Son is the Logos as the mental word, or thought of the mind. Like a thought is generated in the mind, so is Christ begotten of the Father. According to Gill, this analogy demonstrated not only that the Son was eternally with the Father, but that he is distinct from him. These ideas were supported by Gill's exegesis and reflected upon theologically. For instance, in his interpretation of John 1:1, Gill commented that the Son

is the word as the Son of God, as is evident from what is here attributed to him, and from the word being said to be so as in ver. 14, 18. and from those places, where the word is explained by the son, compare 1 John v. 5,7. Matt. xxviii. 19. And is so called from his nature, being begotten of the father; for as the word, whether silent or expressed, is the birth of the mind, the image of it, equal to it, and distinct from it; so Christ is the only-begotten of the father, the express image of his person, in all things equal to him, and a distinct person from him.³⁰

Likewise, in Acts 20:32, Gill explained that

[t]he Lord Jesus is intended, who is the eternal and essential word of God; who, as the word, inwardly conceived, is the image of the mind, equal to it, and yet distinct from it, so Christ is the image of the invisible God, equal to him, and yet a distinct person from him; as the word expressed is the interpreter of the mind, so Christ the word, who was in the beginning with God, and lay in his bosom, spoke all things from him, declared his mind, and explained his will.³¹

Deity, eternity, as well as distinct personality, were all included in this name. In one of Gill's clearest expressions of the analogy, Gill wrote,

He may be so called, because As the mental word, or the conception of the mind, which is Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, is the birth of the mind, begotten of it intellectually, and immaterially, without passion or motion; and is the very image and representation of the mind, and of the same nature with it, yet something distinct from it: So Christ is

³⁰ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:737.

³¹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:342.

the begotten of the Father, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person; of the same nature with him, though a Person distinct from him.³²

There are at least four elements that arise out of Gill's reflection of the Son as Logos: generation, image and representation, consubstantiality, and distinct personhood. From these elements, one can see how the analogy of the mind proved fruitful for understanding eternal generation in the face of its anti-Trinitarian opposition. The analogy of the mind and thought provided another angle at which to behold this divine mystery. With respect to generation, the analogy pointed away from physical, to spiritual generation, an understanding of generation which is more fitting to the nature of God as a divine Being.³³ A true understanding of eternal generation, Gill insisted, required proper theological reasoning. For Gill this meant understanding generation with respect to God's eternal and spiritual nature.³⁴ Understanding the Son as the *Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος*, "the internal mental word," was one such way of conceiving the Son that was consistent not only with his divine nature, but the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead.³⁵ Furthermore, the Son is described in other Scriptures as the "image" or "brightness" of the Father, providing additional ways of apprehending the Son's eternal nature (Col 1:15, Heb 1:3).³⁶

³² Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101.

³³ This is a major part of Gill's argument and use of this analogy. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145. Gilles Emery's chapter, "The Person of the Son" (pp. 176–218), has been invaluable for understanding the significance of Gill's thought, especially on the use of the analogy as a way of understanding eternal generation. Much like Aquinas, Gill's theology of the Word helped him understand and communicate the nature of eternal generation. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178.

³⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145–46. See the above discussion on the matter of right theological reasoning under the heading, "Divine Generation: Rules for Reasoning."

³⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145.

³⁶ I am indebted to Dr. Tyler Wittman for pointing me towards Thomas Aquinas and Gilles Emery as I sought to investigate Gill's use of the analogy of the mind. My conversations with Dr. Wittman have proved invaluable for understanding eternal generation and other related areas of inquiry. Additionally, Aquinas' condensed thoughts in this area can be found below and have been illuminating. I am thankful also to Layne Hancock who originally pointed me to this book that has helped me better understand these issues. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35–39.

The Logos in church history. Gill’s use of the intellectual analogy for understanding this divine name was not unique to him, nor to other Reformed divines.³⁷ Gill observed that the use of the Greek Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος appeared as early as the second century in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, Athenagoras of Athens, Theophilus of Antioch, and Tatian.³⁸ In a passage Gill quoted from *A Plea for Christians*, Athenagoras clearly articulated the mental analogy consistent with the Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος:

And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason (νοῦς καὶ λόγος) of the Father is the Son of God. But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [νοῦς], had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [λογικός].³⁹

Similarly, Gill cited a work of Theophilus in which he spoke of the Son as the Father’s “own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things.” This Word, Theophilus wrote, “always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counsellor, being His own mind and thought.”⁴⁰ Clearly, in these early writers, there was a

³⁷ Despite Gill’s use of this analogy, Muller wrote that “neither Boston, Gill, nor Brown refers to the logical arguments or the Augustinian metaphors, and all three understanding the doctrine of the Trinity as grounded on revelation alone.” While Gill did believe the Trinity was “grounded on revelation alone,” he did, as this chapter will demonstrate, make limited use of the analogy of the mind. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:139.

³⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101. Godet helpfully provided modern references to Gill’s citations of these fathers. Steven Tshombe Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 175–76. See Gill’s extensive quotations from Justin, Athenagoras, and Theophilus, where he observed their use of Logos. Gill understood their references to the Logos as proof of their belief in eternal generation. It is worthy of note that Gill highlights Proverbs 8 as the proof text for each of these theologians. Gill, “A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ,” in *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 6:186–91. Kelly briefly outlined the thought of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists. His section on the Apologists gives specific attention to their understanding of the Logos. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 1978), 90–101.

³⁹ Athenagoras the Athenian, “A Plea for the Christians,” trans. B. P. Pratten, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, rev. ed. (Christian Literature, 1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 133–34 [10].

⁴⁰ Theophilus of Antioch, “Theophilus to Autolytus,” trans. Marcus Dods, in *ANF*, 2:103 [2.22].

conception that the Son was eternally with the Father as a word is in the mind which Gill believed demonstrated their belief in eternal generation. The early church's doctrine of the Son as the Logos, as Jaroslav Pelikan has documented, relied on the Old Testament and was a useful apologetic: "The idea of the seminal Logos provided the apologists with a device for correlating Christian revelation not only with the message of the Old Testament, but also with the glimpses of the truth that had been granted to classical philosophers."⁴¹ Prior to the early church Apologists, Philo of Alexandria "shows a strange synthesis of Old Testament, Platonic, and Stoic features," which he employed "to convince the Gentiles of the universal validity of Judaism." The Logos was thus an idea which Philo, as well as the Christian Apologists, used to engage religious outsiders.⁴² Gill was not only aware of the Church Fathers and their Logos theology, but he was also aware of Philo's. In his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill remarked at the consistency between eternal generation as revealed in John 1:1, 14 and Philo's understanding of the Logos, writing that "this [is] perfectly agreeable to the sense and language of the old Jewish church, as appears from the ancient paraphrases, and from Philo, who says of the

⁴¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 187–88. Grillmeier identified two main sources for the "Logos doctrine" of the early church apologists, namely "Christian tradition" and "Hellenistic philosophy." He adds, however, that "Judaistic exegesis is sometimes combined with both of these." Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John S. Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 108. Kelly described their use thus: "The Apologists were the first to try to frame an intellectually satisfying explanation of the relation of Christ to God the Father. They were all, as we have seen, ardent monotheists, determined at all costs not to compromise this fundamental truth. The solution they proposed, reduced to essentials, was that, as pre-existent, Christ was the Father's thought or mind, and that, as manifested in creation and revelation, He was its extrapolation or expression. In expounding this doctrine they had recourse to the imagery of the divine Logos, or Word, which had been familiar to later Judaism as well as to Stoicism, and which had become a fashionable cliché through the influence of Philo." Kelly, however, wrote that "generation" for these Apologists was not a reference to his eternal relation of origin, but rather to his work in "creation, revelation and redemption." He warned that "Unless these points are firmly grasped, and their significance appreciated, a completely distorted view of the Apologists' theology is liable to result." In Kelly's estimation, the Apologists believed that the Son was one in essence with the Father and yet distinct from him, but that "they lacked a technical vocabulary adequate for describing eternal distinctions within the Deity; but that they apprehended such distinctions admits no doubt." He further clarified their relation to later developments thus: "Later orthodoxy was to describe His eternal relation to the Father as generation; the fact that the Apologists restricted this term to His emission should not lead one to conclude that they had no awareness of His existence prior to that." Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 95–96, 100–101.

⁴² Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:108.

Λογος, or Word, that it is not unbegotten as God, nor begotten as men, and that it is the first begotten Son, with other expressions of like nature.”⁴³

In addition to the early church Father’s and Jewish sources that Gill cited, Bavinck pointed out that “Athanasius and the Cappadocians regularly pictured generation as God’s recognition of himself in his image, as the eternal utterance of a Word. The Father and the Son are related, they said, as mind (νοϋς) is to word (λογος).”⁴⁴ The analogy was certainly employed by the Cappadocian Gregory of Nazianzus, who also claimed that the Son was called Logos on account of the mind analogy: “He is ‘Word,’ because he is related to the Father as word is to mind, not only by reason of the undisturbed character of his birth, but also through the connection and declaratory function involved in the relationship.”⁴⁵ The use of the analogy of the mind continued in Latin thinkers such as Augustine. In his *The Trinity* (*De Trinitate* in Latin), Augustine reflected extensively on the Trinity using a psychological analogy of memory, intelligence, and will.⁴⁶ In book XIV of *De Trinitate*, Augustine developed the analogy of the mind to explain the Trinity:

So when the mind views itself by thought, it understands and recognizes itself; thus it begets this understanding and self-recognition. It is a non-bodily thing that is being understood and viewed, and recognized in the understanding. When the mind by thinking views and understands itself, it does not beget this awareness of itself as though it had previously been unknown to itself; it was already known to itself in the way that things are known which are contained in the memory even when they are not being thought about. We say a man knows letters even when he is thinking about other things, not letters. The two, begetter and begotten, are coupled together

⁴³ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 146.

⁴⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:324–325.

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Fourth Theological Oration* [Oration 30], in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham M. Hildebrand, *Popular Patristics* 23 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 109 [20].

⁴⁶ In his magisterial work of dogmatics, Bavinck pointed out that “it was especially Augustine, however, who in various ways and perspectives found clear imprints of the Trinity in human consciousness and reason.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:325. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 291.

by love as the third, and this is nothing but the will seeking or holding something to be enjoyed. This is why we thought the trinity of the mind should be put forward under these three names, memory, understanding, and will.⁴⁷

Despite some differences between Greek and Latin theologians of the early church, Lewis Ayres highlights a crucial commonality between them that Gill also shared: “In both languages theologians are agreed on the possibility of using the mind’s act of ‘generation’ as a model for understanding the Word: it is the act of generating without material division that such analogies offer.” The immateriality of the analogy is present in the quote of Augustine directly above as he sought to understand the divine persons in terms of memory, understanding, and will. And although Augustine’s reflection in *De Trinitate* was far more expansive than Gill’s, his overall intent to demonstrate unity and distinction in God was consonant with Gill.⁴⁸ Additionally, the use of Logos and the mind analogy to explain eternal generation in spiritual and immaterial terms is precisely the purpose of Gill’s use in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*.⁴⁹

The importance of both Augustine and later Aquinas for the development of this doctrine is acknowledged by Gilles Emery: “Amongst the Fathers, it was St Augustine who particularly worked on pinpointing the nature of the ‘word’ within a theory of relation. Thomas’ project can be seen as a personal development of this legacy.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. 5 (New York: New City Press, 2013), 376–77 [XVI.2.8]. For all of its attention, Ayres elsewhere claims that Augustine’s psychological analogy, or the triad of memory, intelligence, and will, was not “a standard feature of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology” because its dominant use occurs in *De Trinitate* and is limited elsewhere. In short, he states that the triad “is simply absent as a basic tool for illustrating Trinitarian doctrine.” With that said, he thinks that “Augustine certainly sees the mind as the most fruitful analogical site for exploring the Trinity.” Lewis Ayres, “‘It’s Not for Eatin’—It’s for Lookin’ through’: *Memoria, Intellegentia, Voluntas* and the Argument for Augustine’s *De Trinitate* IX–X,” in *The Mystery of the Holy Trinity in the Fathers of the Church: Proceedings of the Fourth International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 1999*, ed. D. Vincent Twomey and Lewis Ayres (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 38–39.

⁴⁸ So Ayres writes that Augustine “uses this analogy in ways that draw on our imagination of mental processes to provide a key analogical base for imagining three things that are distinct and yet form an inseparable unity.” Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 290–91. As Ayre’s describes it, Augustine’s use of this analogy was far more comprehensive than Gill’s, who carefully limited his discussion to the Son’s eternal generation from the Father and his works *ad extra*. See more below under “Gill and the Tradition.”

⁴⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145. See more on this use by Gill below.

He puts forward his own viewpoint ‘as following on from what Augustine has shown.’⁵⁰ Since Gill followed in the trajectory of thought that Aquinas developed, an account of Aquinas is of particular interest for illustrating Gill’s own use of the analogy.⁵¹

Aquinas articulated his doctrine of the Trinity in contrast to both Arianism and Sabellianism.⁵² He thought both views misunderstood the divine processions by conceiving of them as outward acts. Aquinas, however, used the mind to illustrate that procession can not only be understood as an outward, but an inward act: “since procession always supposes action, and as there is an outward procession corresponding to the act tending to external matter, so there must be an inward procession corresponding to the act remaining within the agent. This applies most conspicuously to the intellect.” Rather than by a physical or bodily analogy, Aquinas taught that the intellect was an more appropriate analogy by which to understand procession in God. Procession, then, “is to be understood by way of an intelligible emanation, for example, of the intelligent word which proceeds from the speaker, yet remains in him.”⁵³ Aquinas instructed his readers that Word “is the proper name of the person of the Son. For it signifies an emanation of the intellect: and the person Who proceeds in God, by way of emanation of the intellect, is called the Son; and this procession is called generation.” While other

⁵⁰ Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 179.

⁵¹ To my knowledge, Gill did not cite Aquinas directly anywhere this analogy is mentioned. I do not, however, believe this is because Gill did not read him. Gill appears to have owned a folio edition of Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae*. With that said, it is likely that Gill’s use of the analogy, while downstream from Aquinas, was more immediately influenced by other Reformed orthodox theologians. “A Catalogue of the Library of the Late Reverend and Learned John Gill, D.D. Deceased. Comprehending a Fine Collection of Biblical and Oriental Literature” (unpublished manuscript, Cambridge, 1772), 9. See Park’s conversation with regard to Gill’s similarity among the Reformed as well as broader tradition of thought with regard to the analogy. Hong-Gyu Park, “Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)” (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2001), 249–51.

⁵² Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 189. Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 152–57.

⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Prima Pars, 1–49*, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 13 (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 290 [q. 27, a. 1].

names reveal other particular aspects of his personal property, the name *Word* reveals the immaterial nature of his generation:

For the Son's nativity, which is His personal property, is signified by different names, which are attributed to the Son to express His perfection in various ways. To show that He is of the same nature as the Father, He is called the Son; to show that He is co-eternal, He is called the Splendor; to show that He is altogether like, He is called the Image; to show that He is begotten immaterially, He is called the Word.

For this reason, Aquinas asserted that “[i]n the term *Word* the same property is comprised as in the name Son.”⁵⁴ In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Aquinas explained that John used *Word* and not *Son* in John 1:1 so that the nature of the Son's generation may be properly understood in immaterial terms:

Son means something begotten, and when we hear of the generation of the Son, someone might suppose that this generation is the kind he can comprehend, that is, a material and changeable generation. Thus he did not say *Son*, but *Word*, which signifies an intelligible proceeding, so that it would not be understood as a material and changeable generation. And so in showing that the Son is born of the Father in an unchangeable way, he eliminates a faulty conjecture by using the name *Word*.⁵⁵

Aquinas' doctrine of simplicity undergirded his explanation of the *Word* as he taught that God's understanding, that is, his *Word*, is his existence.⁵⁶ With this in mind, he affirmed the *Word*'s consubstantiality with the Father through the analogy in this way:

The *Word* also cannot differ by nature from God, whose *Word* it is, since it is natural to God to understand himself. For every intellect has some things that it by nature understands (e.g., our intellect by nature understands first principles). Therefore, much more does God, whose understanding is his existing, by nature understand himself. Therefore, his *Word* is from him by nature Therefore, lest

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 355 [q. 34, a. 2, ad. 3].

⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 1–8*, ed. Aquinas Institute, trans. Fabian R. Larcher, *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 35 (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013), 15 [C.1, L.1, 31].

⁵⁶ “Therefore, the word conceived in our intellect, a word that has only intelligible existing, necessarily is of a different nature and essence than our intellect, which is natural existing. But existing and understanding in God are the same thing. Therefore, the *Word* of God, which is in God, and whose *Word* he is as to intelligible existing, has the same existing as God, whose *Word* he is. And so he necessarily has the same essence and nature as God, and all the things predicated of God belong to the *Word* of God.” Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, 37 [I. 41].

we think that the Word of God comes from God by the power of his will and not by nature, the Creed adds: 'Begotten, not made.'⁵⁷

By continuing to rely on the analogy of the mind, Aquinas upheld the distinction of persons in God that did not contravene his affirmation of God's unity and simplicity. Since God necessarily understands himself, and this understanding is his existence, the subsistence of understanding (the Word) does not contradict God's simplicity and unity. He instructed,

it belongs singularly to God's intellect that its concept (i.e., its intellectual representation) is necessarily his substance, since his understanding is his existing. And the same is true about the affection in God loving. Therefore, we conclude that the divine intellect's representation (i.e., God's Word) is distinguished from what produces it only by the relation of the procession of one thing from the other, not in being a substance.⁵⁸

Aquinas put a point on the unity and distinction in God by deducing, "Therefore, it is clear that nothing prevents the Word of God (i.e., the Son) from being substantially one with the Father and yet distinguished from him by the relation of procession."⁵⁹

Protestants in the reformation and post-Reformation periods also made use of the analogy. Calvin, who was otherwise cautious with the use of analogies, nevertheless employed the analogy of the mind to explain this divine name in his commentary of John 1:1: "As to the Evangelist calling the Son of God the Speech, the simple reason appears to me to be, first, because he is the eternal Wisdom and Will of God; and, secondly, because he is the lively image of His purpose; for, as Speech is said to be among men the image of the mind, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God, and to say that He reveals himself to us by his Speech."⁶⁰ In addition to Calvin, Gill cited Antonius Walaeus

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, 38–39 [I. 43].

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, 44 [I, 52].

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, 44 [I, 52].

⁶⁰ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 17:26. Gill himself cited Calvin as holding to this view. Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:167, footnote q. Muller has documented Calvin's reticence to speculate about the Trinity from analogies in nature. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:68–69.

(1573–1639) and Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) as supporters of this position.⁶¹

Among English-speaking theologians whom Gill referenced in his writings, Edward Leigh (1602–1671) and Daniel Waterland (1683–1740) made use of the analogy.

Describing eternal generation, Leigh wrote,

In respect of this generation, the Sonne is called *The Word of the Father*, John 1.1. not a vanishing, but an essential word, because he is begotten of the Father, as the word from the mind. He is called *The Word of God*, both internal and conceived (that is, the Divine Understanding reflected upon it self from eternity, or God’s knowledge of himself) so also he is the inward wisdom of God, *Prov.* 8. Because God knows himself as the first and most worthy object of contemplation, and external or uttered, which hath revealed the counsels of God to men, especially the elect; that we may know the Father by the Sonne as it were by an Image, *John* 1.18. so also he is the externall wisdome instructing us concerning the Will and Wisdome of the Father to Salvation.⁶²

Waterland similarly stated the following in a sermon on John 1:1: “But I must observe, that the Greek Λόγος, which we render WORD, may signify either *inward* Thought, or *outward* Speech. And it has with good reason been supposed by the *Catholick* Writers, that the design of this Name was to intimate that the Relation of Father and Son, bears some Resemblance and Analogy to that of *Thought*, or of *Speech* to the Mind.”⁶³ Richard Muller characterizes William Perkins’ use of the analogy for eternal generation as being a

⁶¹ He additionally cited “Theophilacti,” whom I understand to be Theophylact of Ohrid (1055–1107). Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:167. See Muller on the meaning of Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and Λόγος προφορικὸς in Protestant scholastic thought. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 205.

⁶² Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity: Consisting of Ten Books. Wherein the Fundamentals and Mina Grounds of Religion Are Opened; the Contrary Errours Refuted; Most of the Controversies Between Us, the Papists, Arminians and Socinians Discussed and Handled; Several Scriptures Explained, and Vindicated from Corrupt Glosses*, 2nd ed. (London: A. M. for William Lee, 1662), 264, emphasis original. Leigh provided a near identical statement in his earlier *A Treatise of Divinity*. Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity Consisting of Three Bookes: The First of Which Handling the Scripture or Word of God, Treateth of Its Divine Authority, the Cononical Bookes, the Authentickall Edition, and Several Versions; the End, Properties, and Interpretation of Scripture: The Second Handling God, Sheweth That There Is a God, and What He Is, in His Essence and Severall Attributes, and Likewise the Distinction of Persons in the Divine Essence. The Third Handleth the Three Principall Words of God, Decree, Creation, and Providence* (London: E. Griffin, 1646), 137–38.

⁶³ Daniel Waterland, *Eight Sermons Preach’d at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, in Defense of the Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; Upon the Encouragement given by the Lady Moyer, and at the Appointment of the Ld. Bishop of London* (Cambridge: 1720), 5, emphasis original.

“medieval and specifically Thomist interpretation of the Son’s procession as intellectual.”⁶⁴

The examples above demonstrate that an intellectual understanding of the Son’s generation as the Logos was accepted by numerous theologians from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. As Muller has observed, most of the Reformed “allowed only limited use of traditional metaphors and similes in their exposition. Others, however, broached the question of the traditionary rational argumentation more positively.”⁶⁵ Henry Ainsworth (1569–1622) and Bartholomäus Keckermann (c. 1572–1609) are examples of those who utilized traditional Augustinian and Thomist patterns in presenting the doctrine of the Trinity to a greater extent than most. In the case of Keckerman, his “approach was to draw on the view of God as exercising intellect and will and to associate Word with intellect and Spirit with will, particularly the will as exercised in an act of love,” similar to Augustine and Aquinas.⁶⁶ Ainsworth’s outline of the Trinity also explained the Son in terms of the analogy as the eternal image of God’s understanding that is eternally conceived or generated in God and the Spirit as God’s perfect, eternal, and essential will.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Muller, *PRRD*, 4:313. Perkins explained the Son’s generation using the analogy of the mind: “For this cause also, he is *The Word of the Father*, not a vanishing, but an essentiall word: because as a word, is as it were, begotten of the minde, so is the Sonne begotten of the Father.” William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, Or The Description of Theologie; Containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation, According to Gods Word. A View of the Order Whereof, Is to Be Seene in the Table Annexed.*, trans. [Anon.] (Edinburgh: Robert Walde-grave, 1592), 21.

⁶⁵ I will describe Gill’s use as “limited” below. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:157.

⁶⁶ Muller, *PRRD*, 162–65. See the very short biographical sketch of Ainsworth in Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Peterson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 15–17. The exact date of Keckermann’s birth appears unknown, although it is likely between 1571–1573. Joseph S. Freedman, “The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann (d. 1609),” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141, no. 3 (1997): 326–28.

⁶⁷ Henry Ainsworth, *The Orthodox Foundation of Religion, Long since Collected by That Judicious and Elegant Man Mr. Henry Ainsworth, for the Benefit of His Private Company: And Now Divulged for the Publike Good of All That Desire to Know That Cornerstone Christ Jesus Crucified*, ed. Samuel White (London: R. C. for M. Sparke, 1641), 11–13.

The Reformed, however, did not universally use these analogies. Turretin and Mastricht, for instance, did not employ the analogy of the mind and cautioned the use of analogies. Mastricht stated what he believed to be the common view of the Reformed camp, namely, “that the Trinity cannot be either searched out by natural reason or solidly demonstrated, though at the same time it can be declared and, with respect to its possibility, proved with similar things and *a posteriori* reasons.”⁶⁸ Mastricht provided numerous reasons for this position. First, the Trinity “is a mystery.” Second, Mastricht argued, “it detracts in more than one way from the dignity of this dogma. . . and from the faith itself.” Not only that, it hinders deeper apprehension of the mystery. Mastricht cited Richard St. Victor’s *On the Trinity* (I.1) where he said that “[i]n faith, to seek reasoning is to spread a parasol before a weak eye so that it may not be struck by a more extraordinary light.” Third, Mastricht claimed that “none of the philosophers, not even all philosophers together, by all the acumen of their reason, ever attained to the knowledge of it.” Fourth and furthermore, “The dogma of the Trinity is the basis of the entire Christian faith, and thus if that may be resolved into natural reason, nothing will hinder the whole Christian relation from being resolved into reason, and thus it would degenerate from faith into philosophy.” Mastricht then concluded by stating that “No natural reason can be produced to solidly conclude that therefore the God who is one in essence is three in persons.”⁶⁹ Turretin also decried the attempts of medieval Scholastics to demonstrate the Trinity from “nature and reason, or from the perfection and power of God, or from his understanding, or from the communication of good. . . yet they cannot convince and obtain the force of solid proof.” The common similitudes used to illustrate

⁶⁸ Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, vol. 2, *Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Michael T. Spangler, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 501 [1.2.24.III]. Muller gives a similar assessment: “As implied in the discussion of the mystery of the Trinity, many of the Reformed orthodox, like the Reformed themselves, distances themselves from all forms of rational argumentation *toward* the doctrine of the Trinity and allowed only limited use of traditional metaphors and similes in their expositions.” Muller also confirms Mastricht’s statement about *a posteriori* reasoning. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:157, 162.

⁶⁹ Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:517–18 [1.2.24.XXI].

the Trinity, Turretin argued, “seem to afford some resemblance of the Trinity, though very obscure as they always labor under a great dissimilitude.” He thus concluded that “they ought to be proposed soberly and cautiously, not for the purpose of convincing adversaries, but for confirming believers and showing them the credibility of this great mystery.”⁷⁰ Turretin admitted that “Scripture sometimes alludes to them when it calls the Son of God, *Logos*, ‘Wisdom,’ ‘the image of God’ and ‘the brightness of the Father’s glory.’” Nevertheless, he wrote, “they cannot set forth a full and accurate determination of the mode of this generation,” that is, eternal generation.⁷¹

Gill and the tradition. As Gill’s understanding of *Logos* as an analogy from the mind followed a long tradition throughout the history of the church, his use of the analogy contains some elements of continuity and discontinuity. Gill, unlike Augustine and Aquinas, did not apply the psychological model as a way to explain all three Trinitarian persons. It was, then, not an overarching analogy to explain or illustrate the Trinity. For instance, he completely avoided any such analogy when giving an account of the Holy Spirit. Thus, his use of the analogy was limited to his doctrine of the Son, although in explaining the analogy Gill did not exclude the Father who begets the Son. Nor did Gill sustain any extended reflection of the analogy in any of his works as did Augustine and Aquinas. Rather, Gill’s use of the analogy was carefully limited to explaining why the Son was called Word and what it meant in combination with other analogies or images as will be demonstrated below. His answer was based in the intellectual analogy, which provided a simile for understanding the spiritual nature of the Son’s eternal generation (*Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος*) from the Father and his works *ad extra* (*Λόγος προφορικός*). Nevertheless, Gill kept his descriptions generally brief and closely tied to

⁷⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, *First through Tenth Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 266 [3.25.IV].

⁷¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 302 [3.29.XXX–XXXI].

individual Biblical texts. With regard to the Reformed tradition, Gill followed neither of the approaches represented by Keckermann or Mastricht in their use of the analogy. Keckermann developed the analogy farther and more comprehensively than Gill, and Mastricht refused to explain generation by it. Rather, Gill's doctrine of the Son as the *Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* was a descendent of the Apostolic Fathers and early church Apologists that was later picked up and developed most notably by Augustine and Aquinas. Thus, his expression of the mind-word analogy of the Logos bears similarity to this entire tradition. His employment and expression of the *Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* fit securely within the large wing of Reformed scholastics who carefully used the analogy to explain the meaning of the Son's generation in limited fashion. Moreover, as this dissertation will demonstrate further below, the analogies Gill employed arose as the product of exegesis.

The Begotten Word

Gill explicitly connected the Word with eternal generation in his explanation of the intellectual analogy provided in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*.⁷² According to Gill, the Son is the "mental word, or the conception of the mind," which is "the birth of the mind."⁷³ This birth, or generation, is to be thought of in a particular way in keeping with the nature of the subject.⁷⁴ Thus, as the "mental word. . . is the birth of the mind, begotten of it intellectually, and immaterially, without passion or motion. . . So Christ is the begotten of the Father."⁷⁵ This connection reveals that the name, Word, is closely tied to the name, Son, since it is the Son's generation that is intended by the use of the name. This name, as Gill understood it, helped explain the nature of the Son's eternal generation. Thus, this divine name finds importance as it explained a fundamental

⁷² Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101.

⁷³ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101.

⁷⁴ See Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145.

⁷⁵ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101.

doctrine of the Christian religion. In Gill's mind, the doctrine of eternal generation was indispensable, as it provided the foundation not only for the Son's deity, but was *the* means of explaining the distinction of persons within the divine essence.⁷⁶

The importance of this name appeared in Gill's *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, where, as this dissertation has documented, he produced his most detailed exposition and defense of eternal generation.⁷⁷ In these pages, Gill defended eternal generation against Socinian objections. He approached the discussion from various angles, but contended that divine generation must be understood in a way that is reflective of God's divine, spiritual nature: "When Scriptures ascribe generation to the Divine Being, it must be understood in a manner suitable to it, and not of carnal and corporal generation; no man in his senses can ever think that God generates as man does; nor believe that ever any man held such a notion of generation in God."⁷⁸ Gill thus removed misguided notions of the Father's relation to the Son through generation and made way for a proper understanding of the Son's eternal generation from the Father. After producing a citation of Socinus in which he accused "Evangelics" of holding to a view in which God generates "one like himself . . . as animals do," Gill demonstrated his own approach: "But generation must be understood of such generation as agrees with the nature of a spirit, and of an infinite uncreated spirit, as God is."⁷⁹ It is at this point that Gill began to rely upon the analogy of the mind, drawn from the meaning of the Son's identification as Logos. Additionally, it is at this point where Thomas Aquinas's theology of the Word may help to illustrate Gill's use of the analogy. Gilles Emery explains Aquinas' theology of the Word in this way:

⁷⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143–44.

⁷⁷ See Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143–59.

⁷⁸ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145.

⁷⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145.

The Word is a person who subsists in himself, distinct from the Father from whom he proceeds; being equal to, and of the same nature as, the Father, he is the perfect expression and presentation of the Father. The notion of *Word* also enables one to grasp what it means for God to be Son, using an analogy which is adapted to the spiritual nature of God. To put it another way, it is the notion of the *Word* which, according to St Thomas, gives one an understanding of *begetting the Son* which is best fitted to God.⁸⁰

Consonant with Emery's assessment of Aquinas, it may be said that Gill considered the name, Word, and the analogy that is signaled by it, to be a helpful means of understanding eternal generation in a way that rightly accords with the Son's divine nature. Gill's use of the analogy in this way is made clear by the context of his discussion of the Logos in relation to eternal generation. For Gill, the Son as the Logos provided a way of understanding the Son's eternal generation that was well-suited to God's eternal and spiritual nature. Gill produced an additional example to further the analogy that he believed was entailed in this name when he wrote, "that spirits generate we know from the souls or spirits we have about us and in us; our minds, which are spirits, generate thought; thought is the *conception*, and *birth* of the mind; and so we speak of it in common and ordinary speech, *I conceive*, or such a man *conceives* so and so." This illustration of the relation between a thought to the mind corresponds with the coexistence, distinction of persons in the Godhead, and the relation of the Father and Son in generation: "now as soon as the mind is, thought is, they commence together and they co-exist, and always will; and this the mind begets within itself; without any mutation or alterations in itself." The internal and immaterial nature of generation is thus illuminated by the analogy of the mind, to which this divine name points. As Gill penned it, "the mind to God who is *Nous*, the eternal mind, to Christ, the eternal *Λογος*, word and

⁸⁰ Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 189, emphasis original. With respect to this name, Emery's entire chapter is illuminating (pp. 176–218). According to him, Aquinas' "doctrine of the Word is incontestably the heart of Thomas' Trinitarian theology" (p. 179).

wisdom of God; who is in some sort represented by λογος ενδιαθετος, the internal mental word.”⁸¹

Gill compared this Scriptural analogy with the writings of both Plato and Aristotle, showing their similarity. He quoted Plato’s *Theaetetus*, wherein Plato stated that “thought is λογος, word or speech, by which the soul declares and explains to itself what it considers.” Gill also produced a quote to the same effect from Plato’s *Sophist*, “thought is a discourse within the soul to itself, without a voice.” Gill additionally stated that “Aristotle somewhere calls it the λογος, or word, τω νοι συναιδιον, co-eternal with the mind.” Gill’s citation of these philosophers was not meant to uphold them as authoritative or a primary means of understanding biblical revelation—Gill rooted the analogy in exegetical reflection of John 1 and elsewhere. Gill merely highlighted the similarity between the biblical witness and these ancient philosophers to demonstrate how the biblical witness was concurrent with some of the best of philosophical inquiry.⁸²

According to Gill, the Son, who is the Word of God, is begotten from eternity. This biblical affirmation, however, did not mean that there was ever a time the Son was not. Nor did it mean that the Son was a created being. On the contrary, he is of the very same essence as God. All of these affirmations, Gill asserted, can be proved by the analogy of the mind:

Now if our finite created spirits, or minds, are capable of generating thought, the internal word or speech, and that without any motion, change or alteration, without any diminution and corruption, without division of their nature or multiplication of their essence; then in an infinitely more perfect manner can God, an infinite uncreated spirit, beget his Son, the eternal Word, wisdom, reason, and understanding, in his eternal mind, which he never was without, nor was he before it.⁸³

⁸¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145.

⁸² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145–46.

⁸³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

The exegetical evidence was clear to Gill, since the eternal Word of John 1:1 was also the one “begotten of the Father” in John 1:14. Not only was it biblical, but it was consistent with “the old Jewish church” and Jewish thinkers such as Philo.⁸⁴

Gill expressed the purpose for explaining this divine name: “these things considered, may serve in some measure to relieve our minds, and make it more easy to us to conceive of this wonderful and mysterious affair.”⁸⁵ Gill quoted Amandus Polanus (1561–1610) at length to further demonstrate how the analogy of the mind illustrated eternal generation:

Mental or metaphysical generation . . . is a similitude and adumbration of divine generation; as the mind begets by nature, not by power, so likewise God; as the mind begets a birth simple and perfect, so God; as the mind begets immutably (or without mutation) so God; as the mind begets of itself in itself, so God; as the mind does not beget out of matter without itself, so neither God, as the mind always begets and cannot but beget, so God the Father; as metaphysical generation abides, so the divine.⁸⁶

In Gill’s theology, the identity of the Son as the eternal Logos helped explain the nature of eternal generation against rival theologies. Contrary to Socinianism, the analogy of the mind provided Gill a means of understanding the Son’s eternal generation that upheld the Son’s eternal co-existence and consubstantiality with the Father; and, contrary to Sabellianism, it revealed the personal distinctions between the Father and the Son.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146. Gill produced a host of Jewish writers, including Philo, who referred to the Logos as God’s Son: “The Jews, in Christ’s time, seem well acquainted with the phrase, *The Son of God*; and by it understood a divine Person; as is easy to observe in many places: Now this they must learn from the books of the Old Testament. Their ancient writers speak of the Λόγος, or Word of God, as his Son.” Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 133. See the full section here: Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 33–34.

⁸⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

⁸⁶ Gill cited Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanoviae, 1615), 204. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

⁸⁷ The way in which Aquinas’ theology of the Word functioned to ward off both Arianism and Sabellianism, which at root is the same as Gill on this point, is summarized here: Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 188–89. Again, Emery’s outline of Aquinas’ theology was influential in helping me see these ideas and their function in Gill.

The Image of God

As the Son is the Word, he is also the image of the Father and the brightness of his glory. Gill tied this language from Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 to the analogy of the mind explicitly as mutually defining aspects of the Word.⁸⁸ Gill's interpretation of these texts, then, further illumined his theology of the Word, particularly as it related to the analogy of the mind and the Son's eternal generation to which it pointed.

In Gill's understanding of Hebrews 1:3, being both the image and the brightness of the Father said much of the same with respect of the Word—that he is consubstantial with the Father but is a distinct person from him. With respect to the analogy of the mind, the Word that proceeds by birth from the mind is the brightness of it. Particularly, the Son is the brightness of the Father. By this Gill believed the Scriptures pointed to the consubstantial nature of both the Father and the Son. It is all the glorious perfections of the Father that the Son shines forth. Being the brightness of the Father's glory with respect to the divine essence, "he has the same glorious nature and perfection, and the same glorious names, as Jehovah, the Lord of glory, &c. and the same glory, homage, and worship is given him." Seeking to further tease out the significance of the imagery of the sun—which points to the Father and Son's consubstantiality and personal distinction—he wrote, "the allusion is to the sun, and its beam or ray: so some render it *the ray of his glory*; and may lead us to observe, that the Father and the Son are of the same nature, as the sun and its ray; and that the one is not before the other, and yet distinct from each other, and cannot be divided or separated one from another." The concurrence with the mind analogy can hardly be missed. Although adding to that analogy with the imagery of the Son shining forth the Father's glory like a ray of sunlight from the sun, the import of this imagery leads to the same conclusions—that the Father

⁸⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101.

and Son both exist together from eternity, share the same essence, and yet are personally distinct.⁸⁹

The revelation of the Word as the brightness of the Father's glory provided another analogy, or imagery, for understanding eternal generation. Immediately following Gill's discussion in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* regarding the analogy of the mind as a means of understanding eternal generation, Gill enlisted the imagery of the sun, taken from Hebrews 1:3, to help illumine the doctrine of eternal generation. His conclusions were the same with the sun analogy as they were with that of the mind:

To this may be added another similitude, which may help us in this matter, and serve to illustrate it; and that is the sun, to which God is sometimes compared; the sun generates its own ray of light, without any change, corruption, division, and diminution; it never was without its ray of light, as it must have been had it been prior to it; they commenced together and co-exist, and will as long as the sun endures; and to this there seems to be an allusion, when Christ is called the *brightness*, *απαυγασμα*, the effulgence, the beaming forth *of his Father's glory*, Heb. i.3.⁹⁰

Commenting on the author of Hebrews' reference to the Son as God's image, Gill stated that the Scriptures' revelation of Christ as the image of the Father meant also that he has "equality and sameness of nature, and distinction of persons." Gill quickly explained how: "for if the Father is God, Christ must be so too; and if he is a person, his Son must be so likewise, or he can't be the express image and character of him." Having again connected this analogy to the doctrines of consubstantiality and personal distinction, Gill referred the reader to his note on Colossians 1:15, where this imagery was explained further, and where it evokes a connection with the Logos.⁹¹ Elaborating the meaning of "image" in Colossians 1:15, Gill explained that the Son is the image of the Father—not deity. And he is so as the Son of God. This point led Gill to conclude that

⁸⁹ At this point in his exposition, Gill cross-referenced the Chaldee paraphrases as using the phrase, "the brightness of his glory," and pointed his readers to Wisdom 7:26. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:375, emphasis original.

⁹⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146, emphasis original.

⁹¹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:375.

rather than existing as a different substance that provided a “shadow” of the Father, the Son’s existence as the image of the Father pointed to their equality, consubstantiality, and distinction within the divine nature.⁹²

[he] is the natural, essential, and eternal image of his father, an increated one, perfect and complete, and in which he takes infinite complacency and delight: this designs more than a shadow and representation, or than bare similitude and likeness; it includes sameness of nature and perfections; ascertains the personality of the son, his distinction from the father, whose image he is; and yet implies no inferiority, as the following verses clearly shew, since all that the father hath are his.⁹³

This description, Gill remarked, was consonant with Philo’s writings about the Logos, whom he says is the image of God.⁹⁴

The above discussion reveals a close connection between the Son as Word and Image. This close conceptual and linguistic connection between Gill’s discussion of the mind analogy and his exegesis of Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 demonstrate how Gill understood the meaning of the Son’s identification as the Logos by way of the mind analogy, but also how he explained the nature of the Son’s eternal generation by pointing to other biblical similes or analogies that speak to the same thing. Gill understood that the Scripture’s images and analogies all came together to help Christians understand the person and nature of the Son. Gill used both the analogy of the mind and the sun to assist the Christian’s knowledge of the Son’s eternal generation, which is the Son’s defining and “distinctive relative property” in the Godhead.⁹⁵ Neither analogies were arbitrarily chosen based on what Gill found suitable to explain the Son’s eternal generation. Gill

⁹² Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:171–72.

⁹³ Gill also stated that this could refer to his office as Mediator, “in whom, as such is a most glorious display of the love, grace, and mercy of God, of his holiness and righteousness, of his truth and faithfulness, and of his power and wisdom.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:172.

⁹⁴ Gill also added that the Son may be the “image” of God as mediator, since his mediatorial office “is a most glorious display of the love, grace, and mercy of God, of his holiness and righteousness, of his truth and faithfulness, and of his power and wisdom.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:172.

⁹⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143–44. Similarly, Emery notes that it is the “relation of origin” that is “uncovered in the divine Word.” Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 188.

specifically mentioned that the sun similitude was alluded to in Hebrews 1:3 by the word “brightness.”⁹⁶ Far from a mere rational speculation on the nature of the divine essence and persons, Gill’s use of these similes was the product of grammatical, historical, analogical, and theological exegesis by which every text was interpreted in its full canonical context.

The Wisdom of God

Connected to Gill’s understanding of the Logos was his consideration of him as the Wisdom of God.⁹⁷ Often in Gill’s writings, the two names were mentioned together.⁹⁸ Considering the analogy of the mind, it would make sense that the thought or conception of the mind would also be considered its wisdom. Gill understood references to God’s wisdom in two ways—personally and essentially. Personally, it applied to the second person. Essentially, it applied to the divine essence as an attribute shared by all divine persons. In his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill considered wisdom as an essential attribute of the divine nature.⁹⁹ In other places, such as his exposition of Proverbs 1 and 8, he considered it with respect to the Son personally.¹⁰⁰ The connection between God’s wisdom, the divine Word, and the analogy of the mind, was made explicit in Gill’s *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* when he tied both “word and wisdom of God” to the “internal mental word” represented by the Logos.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 146.

⁹⁷ Recall also the quotations from Calvin and Leigh above.

⁹⁸ While there are more, these examples will suffice. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145, 252. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:333, 349, 382; 7:741.

⁹⁹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 64–70.

¹⁰⁰ See especially his commentary on Proverbs, specifically his comments on Proverbs 1:20. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:333.

¹⁰¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145.

The identification of the Son as Wisdom was made explicit in Gill's exegesis of Proverbs. He wrote that Wisdom is best thought of in Proverbs as a reference to the Son. This designation, he wrote, speaks "of the consummate and perfect wisdom that is in him." Gill applied this designation to the Son in various respects, such as his mediatorial office and his incarnation. Identifying "wisdom" in Proverbs 1:20 with the Son, he referred to wisdom as "a divine Person," immediately invoking the name "Logos," or "Word."¹⁰² In Proverbs 8:22, Gill further clarified that the Wisdom of God was possessed by God "in right of paternity." This same verse, used by Arius (according to Gill) to prove that the Son was created, was interpreted by Gill (as shown above in chapter 3) as a reference to eternal generation. According to Gill, the Wisdom of God has eternally existed with God as the Father's Wisdom and is the Creator of the universe. He commented that this verse "denotes the Lord's having, possessing, and enjoying his word and wisdom as his own proper son; which possession of him is expressed by his being with him and in him, and in his bosom, and as one brought forth and brought up by him . . . when he went forth in his wisdom and power, and created all things; then he did possess his son, and made us of him; for by him he made the worlds."¹⁰³ Gill teased out the implications of Proverbs 8:22: "This shews the real and actual existence of Christ from eternity, his relation to Jehovah his Father, his nearness to him, equality with him, and distinctions from him."¹⁰⁴ This name, given in Scripture to the Son, provided yet another way of understanding the relation of the Father and Son in eternal generation and divine action: the Word is the Wisdom of the Father begotten from all eternity.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:333.

¹⁰³ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:382.

¹⁰⁴ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:383.

¹⁰⁵ See Gill's comments on Proverbs 8:22–24: Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 382–83.

Gill's initial objection to the analogy. While in much of Gill's *Exposition*, and especially in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, he made use of the analogy of the mind when considering the divine Word, it appears that he was not always so comfortable with it. In his sermon, "Paul's Farwel Address at Ephesus," he provided an near-identical description of the analogy which appeared in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, but then argued that this understanding of the name may be too speculative to be useful:

But this [the analogy of the mind] may be thought too curious, and as falling short (as all things else in nature do) of expressing that adorable mystery of godliness. And, indeed, oftentimes, when we indulge our own curiosity, and give a loose to our thoughts this way, we run into confusion, and every evil work. For though Christ is certainly and really God, as well as man; yet I am afraid that our abstracted ideas of him, as God, of his Generation and Sonship, distinct from him, as Mediator, often lead us into labyrinths, and draw off our minds from the principle things we have in view. God having set bounds around his inscrutable and incomprehensible Deity, as he ordered to be set about mount Sinai, when he descended on it; that we may not too curiously gaze upon it, and perish. It seems to be his will, that our saving knowledge of him, and converse with him, should be all in and through Christ the glorious Mediator. With this we should be contented. It is enough for us, that this Divine Person, who is called *λογος*, *the Word*, is God; for John expresses it in so many words.¹⁰⁶

Having made this argument, Gill followed by stating that he believed the Son was called Word because of his work in the economy of salvation.¹⁰⁷

For these reasons Gill was uncomfortable with the analogy for the mind as an explanation of this appellation. But, by the time this sermon was incorporated into *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Gill elided the above qualifying statement and put the analogy forth as a reason for this divine name. It was, in fact, the first reason he gave. While Gill provided no explicit reasoning given for this change of heart, his use of the analogy as an explanation for eternal generation, which he reaffirmed later in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, may provide a clue. It is likely, considering the enormous pressure of anti-

¹⁰⁶ Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:167–68, emphasis original.

¹⁰⁷ Gill, *Sermons and Tracts* (1814–1815), 4:168–71. Gill cited a Targum of Hosea 1:7 as proof that the Son is called Word in this sense. He then outlined four ways in which the Son acts as Word in the economy of salvation. First, he spoke in the eternal council and covenant; second, he spoke creation into existence; third, he knows and speaks the mind of the Father; fourth, he speaks as an advocate for his people in heaven's court. See more on these four points below.

Trinitarianism in England, that Gill was pressed to see the fruitfulness of this analogy for understanding, explaining, and defending the nature of the eternal Son of God.

Exegetical Underpinnings from John 1

While the analogy of the mind, derived from the divine Word, was laden with significance, it arose in Gill's theology as a product of exegetical and theological reflection. Gill's understanding of the divine Word drew heavily from the Prologue of John's Gospel, where the divine Logos prominently appears.¹⁰⁸ Gill stated at the opening of his chapter on the divine Word that John 1:1–2 proves his deity, eternity, co-existence with the Father, and distinct personhood—all realities included in the analogy of the mind.¹⁰⁹ These realities were given shape and significance as they were revealed in the Prologue of John.¹¹⁰

Gill took the opportunity when interpreting the very first phrase of John 1:1 to explain how it refers to the Son, the essential word, and for what reasons. He is the essential Word, Gill reasoned, on account of his being the eternal Son, begotten from eternity as a thought is in the mind. He is also called Word on account of his actions and by his being “the interpreter of his father's mind.”¹¹¹ Gill asserted that by “beginning” (1:1), the apostle John spoke of eternity. As he was in the beginning, he was with God. Here Gill highlighted the personal distinction, but also the consubstantial nature of the

¹⁰⁸ With respect to teasing out the meaning of the intellectual analogy, Gill's commentary does far less than Aquinas'. Nevertheless, Gill's exegesis supported the primary doctrinal assertions that he attributed to the analogy. Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 178, 183–85. This key section in Aquinas' first lecture on the John 1:1–2 provides an clear treatment of the Logos related to what this dissertation has already discussed. Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, 12–16 [C.1, L1, 25–32].

¹⁰⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 85.

¹¹⁰ For an introduction into the ways the Gospel of John was used in the midst of Trinitarian debates in Early Modern England, see Paul Lim's helpful chapter in Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2012), 271–319. Lim points out the importance of John in debates about the Trinity: “The Gospel of John played a formative role in the Christological controversies of both the patristic and the Reformation periods; thus, it comes as little surprise that considerable scholarly attention has been given to its *Wirkungsgeschichte*” (pp. 271–72).

¹¹¹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:737.

Father and Son: “but this phrase denotes the existence of the word with the father, his relation and nearness to him, his equality with him, and particularly the distinction of his person from him, as well as his eternal being with him; for he was always with him, and is, and ever will be.”¹¹² Gill expounded the full deity of Christ by commenting on John’s statement that “the word was God,”

not made a God, as he is said hereafter to be made flesh; nor constituted or appointed a God, or a God by office; but truly and properly God, in the highest sense of the word, as appears from the names by which he is called; as Jehovah, God, our, your, their, and my God, God with us, the mighty God, God over all, the great God, the living God, the true God, and eternal life; and from his perfections, and the whole fulness of the Godhead that dwells in him, as independence, eternity, immutability, omniscience, and omnipotence.¹¹³

Adding to these comments the Son’s works and the “worship given [to] him,” Gill argued for the divinity of the Word from John 1:1.¹¹⁴ The deity of Christ was also substantiated, according to Gill, by the Apostle’s statement in John 1:4, that “in him was life.” Gill claimed that “life” pointed to two things. First, the “divine life” that the Son has in himself (*autotheos*), and, second, the life that he communicates to others. In a likely reference to Job 19:25, Gill correlated this text with Job’s understanding of the Word “as his living redeemer.” This statement, Gill continued, “regards him as the word and living God, and distinguishes him from the written Word, and shews that he is not a mere idea in the divine mind, but a truly divine Person.”¹¹⁵

The divine Word who has life is also the light and the giver of light. It is the divine life of the second person through which men receive their capacity to perceive as rational beings. Gill identified the creating power of the living Word when he wrote, “for when Christ, the word, breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul,

¹¹² Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:738.

¹¹³ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:738–39, Gill’s translation.

¹¹⁴ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:739.

¹¹⁵ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:740, Gill’s translation.

he filled him with rational light and knowledge.” For Gill, this proved the divinity of the Word. He went on to argue that all “spiritual and supernatural light,” by which people are saved, sanctified, and glorified, is from Christ. Gill connected the “light of men” (John 1:4) to the light spoken of in John 1:7, whom he identified as Christ: “by which is meant, not the light of nature, or reason; nor the light of the Gospel: but Christ himself, the author of light, natural, spiritual, and eternal.”¹¹⁶ This identification is further supported, in Gill’s estimation, by appeals to both the Old Testament and Philo, who connected this name to the Logos.¹¹⁷ While the above only samples Gill’s *Exposition* of John’s Prologue, these few passages highlight Gill’s understanding of the essential characteristics of the divine Word, namely, his deity, eternity, co-existence with the Father, and distinct personality.

The Word in the Economic Trinity

Gill’s theology of the divine Word pertained not only to the immanent Trinity, but also the economic Trinity. Gill thought that there are works of the Son both *ad intra* and *extra* that provide a basis for this divine name. These works include the Son’s role in the eternal council and covenant of grace, in his work as Creator, his revelation of the Father’s will throughout all ages, and his work as Mediator. To Gill, these economic works revealed further aspects of the Logos. Not only did Gill consider the Son the Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, the internal Word of the mind, but he also considered him the Λόγος προφορικώς, the external or spoken Word.

¹¹⁶ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:740–41, Gill’s translation.

¹¹⁷ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:741.

The Word of the Covenant

Central to Gill's theology was his conception of the covenant of grace.¹¹⁸ For him, all of salvation flowed out of it. Gill characterized the work of the Son in the covenant of grace as it related to his identity as Logos in this way: "He spake in the ancient council, when the methods of man's salvation were consider'd, consulted and agreed on; and declared, that he would be a surety for all the elect. He spoke for every blessing, and every promise in the covenant of grace. He assented to every article in the covenant between them."¹¹⁹ In Gill's *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, he distinguished between an eternal council and covenant, stating that "these are generally blended together by divines; and indeed it is difficult to consider them distinctly with exactness and precision; but I think they are to be distinguished, and the one [council of peace] to be considered as leading on, and as preparatory and introductory to the other [covenant of grace], though both of an eternal date."¹²⁰ Gill believed that all three persons of the Godhead were included in the eternal council. When Gill outlined the Son's role in the council, he spoke of him as "wisdom itself," and one who was uniquely suited for taking part in the council. One of the ways in which the Son was "fit" for this council was his knowing the thoughts of the Father. In this way, the Son's work in the eternal council was consonant with his identity as the divine Word and Wisdom of the Father:

Jehovah the Son, has the same wisdom, counsel and understanding his Father has; for all that he hath are his; nor does Christ think it any robbery to be equal with him; he is wisdom itself, or *wisdoms*, he is possessed of the most consummate wisdom; in him, even as Mediator, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and he himself says, *Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom*, Prov. i.20 and viii. 14. See Col. ii. 3. yea, he is called the *Wonderful, Counsellor*, Isa. ix. 6. Which not only respects his capacity and ability to give the best counsel and advice to men, as he does, but to assist in the council of God himself; and so the *Septuagint* interpreters understood

¹¹⁸ For more on Gill and the covenant of redemption, or covenant of grace, see Muller's article, in which he argues that Gill was a developer of this doctrine, locating all three divine persons in it. Richard A. Muller, "The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill's Critique of the Pactum Salutis," *Foundations* 24, no. 1 (March 1981): 4–14.

¹¹⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101.

¹²⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 209.

that passage, rendering it, *the Angel of the great council*; whereby it seems as if those Jews then had a notion of this great transaction, and of the concern of the Messiah in it; to whom the whole verse belongs: to which may be added, that Christ the Son of God, was as one brought up with his divine Father, lay in his bosom, was privy to his designs, and must be in his council, and was on all accounts fit for it.¹²¹

As he was a party in the eternal council, the divine Word was also party to the covenant of grace to which it pertained. Gill described the relation between the council and the covenant as follows: “The council before treated of, is the basis and foundation of the covenant of grace, and both relate to the same thing, and in which the same persons are concerned. In the former, things were contrived, planned, and advised; in the latter, fixed and settled.”¹²² What was considered and then settled was the salvation of God’s elect. In Gill’s words, “the covenant of grace is a compact or agreement made from all eternity among the divine persons, more especially between the Father and the Son, concerning the salvation of the elect.” As a covenanting party in the Godhead, Gill considered the Word to be the one who took on the work given him by the Father for the salvation of his people.¹²³ The role that the Word played in the planning of salvation in the council, and then in agreeing to, accepting, and declaring his willingness to do all that was proposed by the Father in the covenant, gives further meaning to the Son’s identification as the divine Word.¹²⁴ Gill described the Son’s open expression of his willingness to accomplish the covenant as a reflection of Psalm 40:8, “he declares with a note of admiration, attention, and asseveration; and his heartiness in it is still more fully

¹²¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 212.

¹²² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 214.

¹²³ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 214. Gill’s chapter’s with regard to the council and covenant are found in Book II, chapters 6–15. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 209–50. For a short introduction to Gill’s covenant theology, see Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God’s Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011), 17–28. For a larger introduction, see Thomas K. Ascol, “The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

¹²⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 226–27.

signified, by saying, *I delight to do thy will.*¹²⁵ Thus, Gill thought that the Son's work in the eternal council and covenant provided a basis for calling him the Word.

Creation by the Word

The divine Word may not only be considered Savior, but must also be considered Creator. As Gill wrote, "He spoke all things out of nothing in the first creation: He said, Let it be so, and it was so; he spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast."¹²⁶ Gill understood that all three persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—worked inseparably in creation as co-efficient causes. Yet, he affirmed that "by him, the eternal Logos, the essential Word of God, the worlds are said to be framed."¹²⁷ It was important for Gill that the Word's action in creation not be understood instrumentally with respect to causation.¹²⁸ Rather, the Word is an efficient cause, along with the Father and the Spirit.¹²⁹ In Gill's words, he created "as a co-efficient cause."¹³⁰ Gill buttressed these claims in his comments on John 1:3 by appealing to the Jewish Targums and Philo, who also wrote about the Word as the creator of the world.¹³¹ Thus, Gill suggested that the Son, the Logos, spoke creation into being in Genesis 1: "Perhaps the divine Person speaking here is the Logos or Word of God, which was in the beginning with God, and was God, and who himself is the light that lightens every creature."¹³² The one who spoke creation into existence, then, was the divine Word of God, begotten from eternity.

¹²⁵ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 227, Gill's translation, emphasis original.

¹²⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101–2.

¹²⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 260.

¹²⁸ Additionally, in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Gill argued that as the Father, Son, and Spirit all act as efficient causes, there can be no other "principle" or "instrumental" cause. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 260.

¹²⁹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:739; 9:375.

¹³⁰ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 260.

¹³¹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:739.

¹³² Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:4.

Λόγος προφορικός: Interpreter of the Mind

In Gill's theology, just as the Word is the thought, or mental word of the mind, he is also the interpreter of it. As the interpreter, he is the one who knows the mind and will of God and reveals it to others. For Gill refers to him as "the interpreter of his Father's mind."¹³³ By this phrase Gill suggested that the Word is the Λόγος προφορικός—the spoken word that interprets or reveals one's mind. Using this analogy, Gill brought together the idea that the Logos is not only eternally God's internal understanding of himself as his eternal Word (Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), but he is also the Word that is spoken and interpreted. He is the Word that makes known the Father's mind and will (Λόγος προφορικός).

As with the Λόγος προφορικός, Gill again cited ancient precedent for the idea that the Son is the interpreter of the Father's mind, finding support from both Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch. In the text that Gill referenced, Justin was describing the ways in which the Son was sent into the world by the Father and appeared in various forms. Justin wrote that "they call Him the Word, because He carries tidings from the Father to men." Justin described this revealing function of the Word while also seeking to maintain his unity of essence and distinction between the Word and the Father.¹³⁴ Gill's citation of Theophilus is a passage in which Theophilus explained that while the Father "cannot be contained" or "found in a place," his Word is and has been revealed and sent by the Father. Theophilus explained that the Word of God was the one speaking in the

¹³³ On this point, Gill cited Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, and Clement of Alexandria. Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 102. Again, Godet has identified these and provides references to modern translations. Godet, "The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill," 175–76.

¹³⁴ "I have discussed briefly in what has gone before; when I asserted that this power [the Word] was begotten from the Father, by His power and will, but not by abscission, as if the essence of the Father were divided; as all other things partitioned and divided are not the same after as before they were divided: and, for the sake of example, I took the case of fires kindled from a fire, which we see to be distinct from it, and yet that from which many can be kindled is by no means made less, but remains the same." Justin Martyr, "Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho," a Jew, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, rev. ed. (Christian Literature, 1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 264 [128].

Garden of Eden. His explanation contains clear references to both the *Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* and the *Λόγος προφορικός*:

But what else is this voice but the Word of God, who is also His Son? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heard of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counsellor, being His own mind and thought. But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation, not Himself being emptied of the Word [Reason], but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with His Reason.¹³⁵

Contained in Theophilus and Justin’s writings, then, is the basic distinction between the internal and interpreted Word of the mind. As a Word resides in the mind, so the Son resides with the Father; as a Word spoken or uttered interprets or reveals the mind, so the Son, when sent by the Father, reveals the mind of the Father. This latter idea of the spoken Word was consistent with the way in which Gill understood the Son’s work in the world—in both the Old and New Testaments.

In his footnote of these Church Fathers, Gill pointed out that Clement of Alexandria rejected the idea of *Λόγος προφορικός*. He also very clearly stated his interpretation of the Fathers he cited in favor of both the *Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* and the *Λόγος προφορικός*: “Let it be observed, that those writers who have used these phrases, did not design them in the same sense, which the Sabellians do, as tho’ the *λόγος* was a mere attribute, and not a real person.” Gill, then, comfortably aligned himself with the precedent of the early church in understanding the Son as both the internal and expressed Word of God.

Biblical precedent for the *Λόγος προφορικός*. Gill believed that Scriptures revealed the eternal nature of the Word as “the interpreter of the Father’s mind” in John 1:14, “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten, which is in the bosom of the

¹³⁵ Theophilus, “Theophilus to Autolytus,” in *ANF*, 2:103 [2.22].

Father; he hath declar'd him."¹³⁶ Gill proved eternal generation from this text, but, more than that, this text also proved that the Son's being in the Father's bosom "denotes unity of nature, and essence, in the father and son; their distinct personality; strong love, and affection between them; the son's acquaintance with his father's secrets."¹³⁷ The Word is the interpreter, because, as one who partakes of the same nature as the Father, he knows his mind. The economic implications of this reality were that "he was capable of declaring his mind and will to his people; which he has done in all generations."¹³⁸ Gill thought that the Word's divine act of declaring the Father's will was evident in Scripture from the very beginning. In the garden of Eden (Gen 3), Gill attributed God's voice to the Word: "It was he, the Word of the Lord God, whose voice *Adam* heard in the garden; and who said unto him, *Adam* where art thou? And it was the same Word of the Lord who continued his discourse with him, and his wife, and the serpent; and made the first discovery of grace to fallen man."¹³⁹ In addition to this, Gill contended that it was the Word who appeared to Old Testament saints as God's will became progressively known. Gill stated in his commentary on John 1:10 that the Word appeared in "human form" before the incarnation: "and he was frequently visible in the world, in an human form, before his incarnation, as in Eden's garden to our first parents, to Abraham, Jacob, Manoah, and his wife, and others."¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, when John wrote that the Word "came unto his own" (John 1:11), he was not speaking of the incarnation, but to his pre-incarnate appearances:

Now Christ, the word, came to the Jews before his incarnation, not only in types, personal and real, and in promises and prophecies, and in the word and ordinances, but in person; as to Moses in the bush, and gave orders to deliver the children of

¹³⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 102, Gill's translation.

¹³⁷ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:746.

¹³⁸ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 102.

¹³⁹ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 102–3, emphasis original.

¹⁴⁰ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:742.

Israel out of Egypt: he came and redeemed them himself with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm; in his love and pity he led them through the Red Sea as on dry ground; and through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night; and he appeared to them at Mount Sinai, who have unto them the lively oracles of God.¹⁴¹

Gill continued his exegesis of John 1:11, “and his own received him not,” stating that their disobedience was toward the Word: “they did not believe him, and tempted him often, particularly at Massah and Meribah; they provoked him to anger, and vexed, and grieved his holy spirit, as they afterwards slighted and despised his Gospel by the prophets.” Tying the Israelite rejection of the Word in the Old Testament to their rejection of him upon his incarnation, Gill concluded, “And so they treated this same *Logos*, or word of God, when he was made flesh, and dwelt among them.”¹⁴²

One of the ways Gill accounted for the Word’s appearance in the Old Testament was through the Angel of Jehovah, or the Lord. As this dissertation has already documented in the above section concerning Gill’s argument for a plurality of persons in the Godhead, Gill believed the Angel of the Lord was the Son—the Word. Gill listed numerous appearances of the Word in the Old Testament under the name Jehovah. According to Gill, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar (Gen 16:7, 10–13) and to Abraham at Mamre (Gen 18:1–2; 19:1). The Angel obliterated Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24) and stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac (Gen 22:11–12). Jacob mentioned that this Angel redeemed him in his blessing to Joseph (Gen 48:15–16), and he is also the Angel “which appear’d to Moses in the bush” (Exod 3:2).¹⁴³ The identity of this Angel, Gill argued,

must be understood, not of God the Father, who is never called an angel; but of the Son of God, the Angel of his presence, who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, went before them, and led them through the Red Sea, and wilderness to the land of Canaan . . . he, whom the Israelites tempted in the wilderness, is expressly

¹⁴¹ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:742–43, Gill’s translation.

¹⁴² Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:742, Gill’s translation.

¹⁴³ The appearances here cited as well as others may be found here: Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 36–42. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 134–35, 164.

called Jehovah . . . and nothing is more evident than that this Person was Christ . . . he whom Isaiah saw on a throne, making a very magnificent appearance, is not only called Adonai . . . but by the seraphim, Jehovah.¹⁴⁴

Additional appearances that Gill documented may be added, but these citations are sufficient to demonstrate how Gill viewed the work of the Word in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Lord. Gill summed up these appearances of the Angel of the Lord with an important hermeneutical rule for reading Scripture: “It is a rule, which, I believe, will hold good, that whenever any voice was heard under the Old Testament dispensation, which is ascribed to *Jehovah*, it is always understood, not of the Father, but of the Word; and whenever any visible shape was seen, it was the shape and form of the human nature, which the *Λόγος*, or Word assumed as a pledge of his future incarnation.”¹⁴⁵ For Gill, the Word in the Old Testament is the *Λόγος προφορικός*.

Gill further believed the Son was called Word, not only because of his appearing and speaking as the Angel of the Lord, but because he was spoken of in the Old Testament. Gill declared, “He is the Word that was spoken of to all the Old Testament-saints, and prophesied of by all the prophets, which have been since the world began; this is the sum and substance of all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament.”¹⁴⁶ This idea of the divine Word who is spoken of in the Old Testament and who is the summation of all God’s promises must be connected with Gill’s covenant theology. The Word is the “sum and substance of all the promises” as he is the “sum and substance” of the covenant of grace:

[H]e is the Alpha and the Omega, as of the scriptures, so of the covenant of grace; he is the first and the last in it, the sum and substance of it; he is every thing, ALL in ALL in it; all the blessings of it are the sure mercies of him, who is David, and David’s Son; he is prevented with all the blessings of goodness, and the covenant-

¹⁴⁴ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 164.

¹⁴⁵ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 41.

¹⁴⁶ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 102.

people are blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, as their covenant-head; all the promises are made to him, and are all yea and amen in him.¹⁴⁷

All the promises spoken of throughout the Old Testament pertain to the Word, who is their sum and substance, the centerpiece and faithful one who brings the promises of the covenant to their completion.

In Gill's theology there was a progression of revelation in the Old Testament that was drastically escalated with the coming of Christ in the New Testament. He expressed the differences between the eras with respect to the revelation of God's will in the Son:

And there is a difference between these two revelations in the manner in which they were made; the former was at sundry times, and in diverse manners, the latter was made at once, and in one way; that was delivered out in parts, and by piece-meal, this the whole together; the whole mind and will of God, all his counsel, all that Christ heard of the father; it is the faith that was once, and at once, delivered to the saints; and it has been given out in one way, by the preaching of the word: to which may be added, that formerly God spoke by many persons, by the prophets, but now by one only, *by his son*; who is so not by creation, nor by adoption, nor by office, but by nature; being his own son, his proper son, begotten of him, of the same nature with him, and equal to him; and so infinitely preferable to the prophets: he is son, and not a servant, in whom the father is, and he in the father, and in whom the spirit is without measure; and God is said to speak by him, or in him, because he was now incarnate.¹⁴⁸

While the divine Word was revealed in the Old Testament, and while God made his mind known through various ways and by various means—the full and final revelation of his mind came through the incarnate Word. The Word, as the interpreter of the mind of the Father, has made him known finally and definitively.¹⁴⁹ The divine Word not only knows

¹⁴⁷ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 226.

¹⁴⁸ Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:374, Gill's translation of Hebrews 1:2 in italics, emphasis original.

¹⁴⁹ Gill commented on John 1:18 that Christ "has clearly and fully declared his [the Father's] nature, perfections, purposes, promises, counsels, covenant, word, and works; his thoughts and schemes of grace; his love and favour to the sons of men; his mind and will concerning the salvation of his people; he has made, and delivered a fuller revelation of these things, than ever was yet; and to which no other revelation in the present state of things will be added." Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:746.

the mind of the Father, but he has set about to reveal it. The full and final revelation of the Father's mind was the appearance of the incarnate Word.

Mediator and intercessor. The final aspect of the work for which the second person is called the divine Word is his work as Mediator: "Besides, he, as the Word speaks for the elect in the court of heaven, where he appears in the presence of God for them; acts the part of a Mediator on their account; calls for, and demands the blessings of grace for them, as the fruit of his death; pleads their cause, and answers all charges and accusations exhibited against them."¹⁵⁰ Gill here pointed to Christ's work as a priestly intercessor for his people. Gill elsewhere described the specific manner in which Christ, the Word, intercedes by speaking and working with great power and effectiveness for his people:

Moreover, Christ intercedes, not as asking a favour, but as an advocate in open court, who pleads, demands, and requires, according to law, in point of right and justice, such and such blessings to be bestowed upon, and applied unto such persons he has shed his blood for; he speaks, not in a chartitative, but in an authoritative way, declaring it as his will, on the foot of what he has done and suffered, that so it should be.¹⁵¹

As the head of the covenant of grace, the Word acts as mediator, and as mediator, he acts as priest.¹⁵² The intercessory acts that Gill described of the Word are all acts that he performs as mediator and priest of the covenant of grace, which, as this chapter has shown, are all acts that the Word assented to do in the covenant of grace.¹⁵³ It is upon account of this priestly work of intercession, and all his other works outlined above, that

¹⁵⁰ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 103.

¹⁵¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 433.

¹⁵² Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 421.

¹⁵³ For more on Christ as mediator and priest of the covenant, see his exposition of Hebrews and chapters on the priesthood of Christ in the *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:372–493. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 427–39.

Gill stated that the Son “may be properly called the Word, and Word of God.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, the priestly works that are solely fulfilled by Christ provide yet another way of understanding the significance of the Son’s identity as Logos.

Conclusion

John Gill’s theology of the divine Word informed his understanding of both the Son’s divine nature and his divine works and reveals his dependence on church tradition. The analogy of the mind drawn from the Logos provided Gill with a way of understanding the nature of the Son’s eternal generation in accordance with its spiritual nature that affirmed the Son’s consubstantiality and personal distinction. Gill connected his understanding of the Logos through the analogy of the mind with mutually-defining metaphors of brightness and image and his identification of the Son as Wisdom.. Crucial to Gill’s understanding of these divine names and analogies was his exegesis of John 1, which affirmed the truths Gill drew out of the analogy of the mind, namely, that the Word is divine, eternal, co-existent with the Father and yet distinct from him as a divine person. The Son as the Logos also underscores his actions *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Gill believed the Son was called Word because he was the one who spoke at the eternal council and covenant of grace, who spoke creation into existence, and who interprets the Father’s mind to others. Being the sum of all God’s promises in the covenant of grace, he is the Word spoken of in the Old Testament and is the final revelation of the Father’s mind, who, as Mediator and priest, intercedes and provides the blessing of salvation promised in the covenant of grace. Thus, Gill’s theology of the Logos aligned with the broad history of Trinitarian thought by reflecting on this divine name through an analogy of the mind.

¹⁵⁴ Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 103.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

John Gill was called into the ministry in the midst of a rapidly changing religious culture. With respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, the effects of the enlightenment were felt very close to home. Anti-Trinitarianism gained ground in the seventeenth century and continued as a force of influence into the eighteenth century. The year Gill was ordained, the demise of Presbyterians and General Baptists was “written on the wall,” as it were, at Salters’ Hall. Among these denominations, the Particular Baptists avoided the dive into Trinitarian heterodoxy. John Gill, through his influential ministry and writings, played a critical role in guarding the Particular Baptists from the anti-Trinitarianism of the age. The doctrine of the Trinity was no passing concern for Gill. It occupied his attention from the early seasons of his ministry until the end of his life. Gill’s *The Doctrine of the Trinity* articulated a biblically driven doctrine of the Trinity that was first given in the form of lectures. Some of Gill’s Trinitarian theology in *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* was preached to his congregation prior to publishing. Gill’s ecclesial context certainly played a role in his expression of the Trinity. Despite Gill’s consistency in doctrine throughout his ministry, he found that further clarity was needed to uphold the purity of the church. Thus, Gill led his church to amend their statement of faith in order to clarify their understanding of the Trinity. The amendment to their statement of faith concerns the main focus of this dissertation—eternal generation.

Throughout his ministry Gill was forced to contend with anti-Trinitarian assaults on the Son’s eternal generation and revisionist interpretations of it. On the side of the anti-Trinitarians, Socinian interpretations threatened the full deity and eternity of the Son while Sabellianism threatened his distinct personhood with the Father. Gill held

the traditional line against both, contending for the Son's full deity and distinct personality. On the side of the revisionists, Gill argued contrary to Röell and Ridgley that without the doctrine of eternal generation, the doctrine of the Trinity is indefensible. Thus, Gill contended that the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation from the Father was the centerpiece of Trinitarianism. According to Gill, the doctrine of eternal generation provided the basis for distinctions between the Trinitarian persons such that without it, no meaningful distinctions could be made. Thus, Gill argued that eternal generation was the *sin qua non* of Trinitarianism. According to Gill, eternal generation was the only way to ground Christ's Sonship, contrary to Socinianism. For Gill, eternal generation was the generation of person rather than a generation of essence. Following John Calvin's assertion that the Son was *autotheos*, Gill made a sharp distinction between the Son's deity and personality with respect to eternal generation. In doing so, Gill affirmed that while the Father begets the *person* of the Son, he does not beget or communicate the Son's deity. Rather, as God, the Son is *autotheos*, of himself. Gill followed Calvin's position to such a high degree of clarity that he asserted the Son was the *fons Deitatis* like the Father, calling him "the fountain of life." As God, having life in himself, Gill denied that the divine essence was communicated to the Son in eternal generation. Gill's adaptation of Calvin was a departure from church tradition and the vast majority of Reformed scholastics who believed that generation entailed a communication of the divine essence. This deviation from the established doctrine of generation manifested Gill's ability to theologize independently from those with whom he otherwise identified and aligned. This moment of autonomous thinking shows the amount of pressure Socinian thought had exerted on the traditional conception of eternal generation. In order to combat the threats of subordinationism and uphold the Son's full deity, Gill rejected the majority view and adopted Calvin's development of the Son's aseity in an unmistakable way.

Rather than understanding eternal generation as a communication of essence, Gill found it more fruitful to reflect on the identification of the Son as the Logos. Following the Apostolic Father and second-century Apologists, Gill understood this name through the analogy of the mind, calling the Son the internal (Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and spoken word (Λόγος προφορικός). This analogy, Gill believed, was one way to conceive of the Son's eternal generation in a way that honored his spiritual nature. He used the analogy to affirm the deity, eternity, and distinct personality of the Son, which served to curb subordinationist and modalistic arguments against eternal generation. Gill's understanding of the Logos was also informed by his understanding of the Son as the Image and Wisdom of God, which supported his conviction that the Son was a distinct and divine person. Gill also believed that the Son's identification as the Logos also informed his beliefs in the Son's work *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Gill believed that as the Λόγος προφορικός, the spoken Word, the Son spoken in the eternal council and Covenant of Grace. Not only that, but as spoken Word, the Son spoke creation into existence, conversed with God's people throughout the Old Testament, revealed himself as the Angel of the Lord, was the one of whom the Prophets foretold, and was finally the Father's full communication of himself at the incarnation. Thus, Gill's theology of the Logos comprehensively informed his view of the Son both essentially and economically.

Although Gill rejected the idea that the Father communicated the essence to the Son, he vigorously affirmed that the Son's generation was an immanent act. That is, the Son was begotten, as Gill said, *in* the divine essence. Understanding generation as the Son's relative property, he asserted that his generation could only refer to his distinction from and relation to the other persons. Asserting that the divine essence is begotten would, by implication, predicate the Son's relative property on all three divine persons who share the essence. For these reasons, Gill carefully distinguished between language that referred to the divine persons and that which referred to their shared essence. Eternal generation, in Gill's mind, pertained primarily to the former.

Not only did Gill believe that the Son's generation reveals his distinction in the divine essence, but he also thought it revealed a divine ordering among the persons. Gill rejected any idea of eternal generation that construed God as imperfect, immutable, or temporal. Instead he believed that the Son's generation from the Father should be thought of in terms of personal ordering, what Gill termed a priority of order. For Gill, then, eternal generation reveals an ordering of the persons by which the Son is understood to be logically second in order to the Father.

On the whole, Gill developed his doctrine of the Trinity by holding fast to the conventional terminology and its conceptual framework by largely accepting the Trinitarian grammar that the church had developed and defined throughout the centuries. While Gill resourced the early church and formulated his doctrine consistent with medieval thought, his doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship was closely patterned after the Protestant scholastics. His exegesis, theological argumentation, and overall theological structure and method relied heavily upon Reformed scholastic thought. Since Gill faced some of the same challenges to the doctrine of the Trinity as his Reformed predecessors, he benefitted greatly from their writings and took many cues from them.

Despite Gill's respect for this tradition, he was not afraid to depart from it. In his understanding of generation, Gill broke from tradition in an effort to preserve it. Facing down opposition to eternal generation, Gill redefined aspects of eternal generation in order to conserve one of its core affirmations: the full deity of the Son. Thus, while Gill honored those who came before him, he was not held captive to their thoughts. Instead, he endeavored to take all of his thoughts captive to Christ, the eternal Son of God. In doing so, Gill revealed himself as both a traditional and independent theologian.

Further Research

This dissertation has sought to give an account of Gill's doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship by taking his pastoral vocation and theological context into account by

focusing on his exegetical and theological material in relation Reformed scholastic thought. This is room for continued attention on Gill's doctrine of the Trinity and eternal generation. Research comparing Gill to his eighteenth-century American counterpart, Jonathan Edwards, would be very fruitful. Furthermore, Gill's thought about the ontology of the Holy Spirit has not yet received sustained treatment. The connection between Gill's doctrine of the Trinity, his covenant theology, and soteriology should be explored, taking into account his use of Reformed scholastic sources. Lastly, an analysis of Gill the preacher through an analysis of his sermonic material should be pursued by further researchers. Many more topics of research can be listed, as Gill's thought continues to remain in obscurity, even among his Baptist descendants.

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ABSTRACT

“THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE”: JOHN GILL’S DOCTRINE OF CHRIST’S ETERNAL SONSHIP

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
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John Gill believed that without the doctrine of eternal generation the doctrine of the Trinity could not be upheld. For Gill, this doctrine provided the foundation for the distinctions between the persons within the Godhead and evinced the Son’s divine nature. Both of these aspects of Gill’s doctrine of eternal generation were crucial in defending the doctrine of the Trinity in opposition to Socinianism and a resurging Sabellianism. While Gill’s doctrine of the Trinity and eternal generation belonged within the Nicene tradition, he followed Calvin’s understanding of the Son as *autotheos* that led him away from the Nicene tradition’s dominant formulation of eternal generation as a communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son. Gill, in reaction to the anti-Trinitarian context of his day, opted for Calvin’s definition, arguing that the Son, just as much as the Father, is the *fons Deitatis*. While Gill’s doctrine of aseity, as it related to generation, took a narrow turn in what could be described a “Calvinistic” direction, he adopted a familiar understanding of the Son as the divine Word by way of the mental analogy. The Son’s designation as the Image and Wisdom of God further advanced his understanding of the Son as the Word—a name he believed pointed to the Son’s consubstantiality and personal distinction. Gill also applied the Son’s identification as the Word to the Son’s works in creation and salvation, taking his understanding of this name in a Reformed direction by appropriating it into his covenant theology.

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