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BOOK REVIEWS


Given that the events described in the New Testament cannot be fully grasped without an understanding of the context in which they were written, this volume, edited by two well-known biblical scholars, Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald, aims to provide its readers with a sketch of the cultural, social, and historical context of the New Testament. For this work, the editors have gathered respected scholars, such as Ben Witherington III and James D. G. Dunn, and newly emerging ones, such as David Instone-Brewer, most of whom specialize in Second Temple Judaism. Over 640 pages, the book offers readers a brief introduction establishing the historical chronology that is crucial for situating a variety of backdrops of the New Testament, and five sections conveying an overview of the contexts where early Christianity developed.

Part One: “Setting the Context: Exile and the Jewish Heritage” consists of five essays focusing on Jewish history. For example, Larry H. Heyler and Everett Ferguson set the context for the time period of the Babylonian exile throughout Herodian Dynasty era and offer their readers a critical account of the upheaval of Jewish history such as the blend of Hellenism with Jewish nationalism and the resistance during the Maccabean revolt. To that end, both authors draw together the records of Josephus, Philo, the Gospels, and the Book of Acts. Since the events in the New Testament were written in the complicated historical contexts of the first-century Judaism, Jesus along his disciples and their ministries cannot be properly comprehended unless the readers are familiar with Jewish tradition and its contexts.

Part Two: “Setting the Context: Roman Hellenism” is organized into eight essays which deal with a variety of topics such Greek religion, Greco-Roman philosophical schools, economics, society, and education. This second section sets Christianity within the context of the Greco-Roman world. Contextualizing overall Roman life, Moyer B. Hubbard and Nicholas Perrin, for instance, deal with several topics such as the Imperial Cult, which presents Augustus as “savior” or “god.” As such, these authors
shed light on the tension between the early Christianity community and the Roman Empire. Moreover, the marginalized such as slaves and women in the Greco-Roman society also received much attention from Lynn H. Cohick and Ben Witherington III. This kind of politics, religion and cultural influence became pervasive throughout the whole of the Roman Empire, which inevitably caused Judaism and the formation of early Christianity to be significantly affected by Hellenism. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that the New Testament writings also engaged with the cultural impact of the Roman empire.

Part Three: “The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism” contains twelve essays and addresses the topic of how Jewish people exerted all their powers to maintain their identity under the influence of Roman Hellenism. To be more specific, Instone-Brewer opens with the illustration of the temple around which Jewish life and the temple priesthood were organized. Lidija Novakovic then moves to the story of the Samaritans and the Gerizim temple, against which Jews held hostility along with the disperse view of the temple while coexisting with Samaritans. Furthermore, Michelle Lee-Barnewall describes the origin and the unique characteristics of a few religious or political sects such as Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees, demonstrating how they retained their religious identity under the dominion of a foreign empire. The rest of essays discussed more specific topics, such as The Dead Sea Scrolls (C.D. Elledge), the Zealots (James D. G. Dunn), Apocalypticism (Larry R. Heyler), and Synagogue and Sanhedrin (Kenneth D. Litwak), among others.

Part Four: “The Literary Context of Early Christianity,” which includes eight essays, deals with ancient literary writing and explores how this influenced the writers and the formation of the New Testament. The contributors of this section discuss relevant topics from the phenomenon of writing and reading in the first century (E. Randolph Richards) to various ancient texts, such as pseudonymous writings (Lee Martin MacDonald, Homer (Thomas E. Phillips), Josephus (Michael F. Bird), and Philo (Torrey Sealand), Rabbinic literature (Bruce Chilton), and non-canonical writings (Nicholas Perrin). Overall this section provides readers comparative contexts for understanding better the development of the New Testament.
Part Five: “The Geographical Context of the New Testament” consists of nine essays in which readers can find helpful information about the geography and the historical and social contexts of the New Testament world. All authors in this chapter list the ancient cities where Christianity made inroads and shed light on common assumptions taken for granted by the readers. All of this promotes readers’ understanding of the early Christian community in the context of the Roman Empire in which various religions could be found.

Now this volume has a few of shortcomings: First, the black-and-white pictures provided are of poor quality. Second, although the topics are generally well organized, some topics overlap between the five parts. Third, the book indeed covers a broad scope of the subject, but the content tends to be dense. Therefore, some readers—especially those who are not very familiar with the terminology used—might find this book difficult to read. Despite these limitations, however, The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts will probably be commended by those who are interested in the historical and social context of the New Testament. This volume as a whole will be an excellent addition as a reference book. In fact, the annotated bibliography at the end of each chapter will certainly promote further research. Overall, as a student of theology, I appreciate the work done by editors and all the authors to offer their readers valuable information about the New Testament in a single volume.

― Yun Suk Kang


In her book A Little Handbook for Preachers: Ten Practical Ways to a Better Sermon by Sunday, Mary S. Hulst provides ten ways to write and deliver a better sermon. Hulst offers a range of useful advice from biblical preaching to receiving feedback. In fact, Hulst writes her advice in the same way a good pastor would: first by offering theological reasons, and then offering some practical examples.
A Little Handbook for Preachers has ten chapters throughout the book which all focus on a different aspect of preaching. The author lays out her chapters in a way that moves from a theological approach to a more practical one. For instance, in Chapter 8, Hulst talks about preaching as an embodied activity, where she writes about the need of preachers to evaluate what they do with their bodies while preaching in a congregation. She gives practical advice to film oneself and watch if one’s gestures have a purpose. To justify this advice, Hulst argues that a person’s gestures in preaching matter because of the incarnation. She states, “Our bodies matter to God. Our bodies (e.g. voices and gestures) are tools for preaching.” (136) Hulst writes about practical issues and offer some theological backing. In Chapter 2: “God-Centered Preaching,” Hulst does this in reverse. She first gives a series of reasons for preaching a “God-Centered” sermon: “Using precise and theological accurate language for God enables us to counteract some of the caricatures that people have of God.” (39) Hulst then argues that a “God-Centered sermon” helps people develop a better view of who God really is. Thus, after giving these theological foundations, Hulst tells her readers how to better write a “God-Centered sermon” and offers interesting ideas that can be used to enhance a sermon (44-46). Much of Hulst’s advice follows this format above which is very similar to how a sermon would be written. She writes this book giving us first what we, as Christians, believe about a particular issue in preaching, and then moves on to the practical value it has for the preacher.

Now, while Hulst organizes her advice on preaching very well, occasionally that advice needs more explanation and further discussion. For example, she argues in a few places about being honest with the congregation. This advice is really important for a pastor, but it becomes a bit trickier when it pertains to writing a sermon. In Chapter 9: “Selfless Preaching,” she tells the story of why gaming would be something that could consume hours of her students’ life (162-163). She realized how this topic was important to many of her students, but she warns that if someone used video games as an example, one should not pretend to be a gamer (163). This is good advice because pastors would not want their congregation thinking they enjoy activities that they do not know much about.
Nonetheless, in Chapter 5: “Imaginative Preaching,” Hulst argues that all the stories or illustrations pastors use in their sermon should be true (95). She uses an example of a pastor who told her congregation a story about “Uncle Jim,” and it turned out she never had an uncle called Jim (95). It seems like Hulst would be fine with changing names of people in a story, but Hulst does not really say how far a person should go. In a culture which demands more illustrations every passing day, some pastors may have a hard-time finding real life situations they nicely relate to their sermon. While stories from books or movies may be useful, nothing beats a real experience to send a sermon home. I ask myself, can a pastor make up stories as long as the church knows they are not true? Can pastors emphasize certain aspects of a particular situation to better relate to their point? What I see here is that there are plenty of unclear areas when it comes to illustrations for a sermon. This is one example of some advice which Hulst gives throughout the book I think needs more explanation. Hulst writes later about referencing sourced work (Cf. 97). She rightly points out the importance of giving credit when one uses others’ ideas, though she does not discuss about how doing that can distract people from the message of the text. And while some of Hulst’s advice could be considered subjective, other advice is standard practice for all pastors to know, such as learning the context of where one is preaching in order that a sermon can best be received by the listeners (Cf. 104-105).

Overall, A Little Handbook for Preachers is essentially a crash course for preachers who have found themselves preaching in a congregation or even a layperson who wants to better understand what their pastor is doing. In this respect, Hulst does a great job by approaching theologically some things pastors do, such as choosing the kind of clothing they should wear. As I mentioned above, Hulst does this like a good preacher would do it: by telling us first what Christians believe about the topic, and then telling us why the topic is important for us today.

— Chadd M. Huizenga

Incubation as a Type-Scene is the revision of Koowon Kim’s doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago. In the introduction, Kim states that previous studies on incubation in the biblical and ancient Near Eastern scholarship focus on history-of-religion approach to incubation and have not been successful (4). This is an important statement to differentiate his research direction with other previous studies. He points out a current impasse in the study of incubation as follows: First, the texts that contain the concept of incubation with a clear definition are rare. Second, more importantly, he thinks the lack of a precise definition of the term is a crucial disadvantage (5). To define the term clearly, Kim suggests three different levels: the lexical meaning, the religious meaning, and the literary meaning. Then, he clarifies that his study is about the literary meaning of incubation.

Even though Kim thinks the religious reality of the incubation practice is related with the incubation as a literary motif, the correlation between them is not necessary. Also, he proposes the use of the Homeric conception of the type-scene of Robert Alter as “a tool for defining and identifying incubation as a literary device.” (14) He finds a justification of his concept about incubation as a type-scene in its flexibility of a type-scene that Nagler insists. Nagler suggests “family resemblance” in a recurrent scene in the Bible which results from “pre-verbal Gestalt” in biblical authors’ minds, while he rejects “a fixed formula,” which cannot include other variations of the formula. Therefore, Nagler’s “family resemblance” enables Kim to apply the concept of type-scene to incubation without unnecessary argument about identifying various variations from a standard type-scene as incubation type-scene. In other words, he finds grounds from Nagler’s claim to support his idea about incubation as a type-scene.

To identify the rite according to the history-of-religion approach, one needs to find a sequence of various acts in the actual practice of incubation. But under the literary-device approach, “the multifaceted motif” is treated as a tool to identify and analyze the literary text (14). Kim does not neglect the research about the incubation practice in ancient Near Eastern society.
such as Mesopotamia, Hatti, Egypt and Greece. On the base of the “family resemblance” concept and the assumption about the familiarity of Ugarit and ancient Israel with the incubation practice, Kim closely examines incubation as a type-scene in three ancient texts—Aqhatu, Kirta, and Hannah Stories. Definitely, he does not ignore various motifs comprising the incubation type-scene, not for the concept of essential or standard components of the incubation type-scene, but for a pool of representative motifs: predicament of a protagonist, time, place, preparatory ritual observances, epiphany, theophany, and divine message/divine-human dialogue, for example (62). It seems Kim has done this massive research very carefully and thoroughly. He reviews previous studies on each text and the incubation motifs respectively along their narratological role in the texts examined.

As Kim mentions in the introduction, the subject of incubation in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern studies has been related with historical facts about the incubation practice, and the results have not been fruitful. In my opinion, by focusing on the nature of the literary device of the motif of incubation, Kim offers an opportunity to revive the term incubation in the biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies. As a result, his book is helpful to lessen the gap not only between readers and ancient texts, but also between contemporary readers and ancient listeners/readers of the texts who knew the incubation motif in their real life. In the point of view of biblical criticism, this work offers an excellent approach to the texts with both synchronic and diachronic interests. By recuperating the ancient convention—which is diachronic—this type-scene study gives synchronic result, which is an intended understanding of the authors of each text.

Although the incubation type-scene has complicate elements such as “sacrifice, dream, theophany, healing, oracle, etc.,” Kim examines its narratological functions as a literary device in three texts greatly so that readers of those texts can gain more understanding of the text (11). He does not roughly skip any related motifs such as the development of the predicament, the offering, ritual clothing, weeping, the expression of joy, etc. Now, there is a minor confusion in the book about the Greek healing god’s rod, the Rod of Asclepius, which is a serpent-entwined rod and often mistakenly referred to as a caduceus. The caduceus is the rod of Hermes
in Greek mythology. Mistakenly, Kim depicts the healing god, Asclepius, with a caduceus, the rod of an Olympian god.

— Caris Kim
"The intellectual" is one way to refer to the category of persons with a particularly gifted intellect. While perhaps possessing various technical abilities or professional skills, "the intellectual" tends to be defined more as that category of person with the highest capacity for comprehending, processing, connecting, and explaining ideas. The responsibility of "the intellectual" is perhaps one of the most ill-defined within the American Church, as well as the rest of American culture. "The intellectual" is thought of in terms of professional options, such as scholar, pastor, politician, writer, and otherwise, but the higher calling of "the intellectual" is often overlooked. Nevertheless, Dr. Cornel West illuminates the calling of "the intellectual" in society when he teaches, "the vocation of the intellectual is to...let suffering speak, let victims be visible, and let social misery be put on the agenda of those in power...[and] that moral action is based on a broad, robust propheticism that highlights systemic social analysis of the circumstances under which tragic persons struggle." While intellectualism has been abused to self-serve and oppress, Dr. West prophetically calls "the intellectual" to the service of the oppressed.

Dr. West’s concern for the oppressed is mirrored in the central themes of the New Testament gospels. The idea that those who would follow Jesus are called to be disciples and builders of a kingdom which Justo Gonzalez refers to as “the great reversal” is eminently important for the gospel writers and the message of Jesus Christ. All who are called to follow Jesus are called into a way of living which reverses the natural pursuit of power in favor of protesting wicked power structures and advocating for the oppressed. However, "the intellectual" has a particular calling within

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this calling. The description of this is illuminated by Dr. West, but in fact there is an example set out for “the intellectual” in the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Luke is an example of the societal responsibility of “the intellectual” because Luke writes persuasive history to affluent people in order to illuminate the plight of the oppressed and prophetically teach a new social order revealed by Jesus.

In order to see the Gospel of Luke in this light, it is important to pay attention to some of what can be perceived about the author. For example, Luke’s credentials as an intellectual can be found in his work as a historian. Luke employs tactics that look remarkably similar to modern history. Justo Gonzalez draws attention to this fact in *The Story Luke Tells* when he points to the fact that, “Only Luke [in contrast to the other gospel writers] shows a particular interest in dating the events that he discusses” and “takes care to...take into account the political, social, and religious context.” In case anyone should question the lasting impression this has had on the Church, Gonzalez also notes that the only reason the Apostles’ Creed says Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate” is because Luke dated Jesus’ death by reference to the historical Pontius Pilate. Further, Luke demonstrates significant intellectual credentials in his use of a wide repertoire of social, political, and geographic data. Luke was clearly educated, and demonstrates an intellectual capacity for employing that education in the fashion of a historian.

Luke further demonstrates his intellectual character in his ability to connect and explain ideas. Luke not only writes regarding the history of Jesus in his present day, but also connects Jesus to the history of the Church. Luke writes his story of Jesus with the intention of chronologically demonstrating Jesus’ connection with the birth and growth of the Church in the book of Acts. In addition, Luke places the story of Jesus and His Church into the grand history of all of humanity. Gonzalez sees this in Luke’s genealogy of Jesus, which intentionally traces back to Adam (“The Son of God,” Lk. 3:38) and so “Luke is implying that in Jesus a new

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For Luke, the story of Jesus and the birth of the Church is the climax of the history of the world. Luke communicates this with precision as his brilliant mind draws the reader into the profound implications that follow.

After recognizing Luke’s credentials as an intellectual, and his writings as the works of an intellectual, and after understanding the responsibility of the intellectual in society as one which “…puts social misery on the agenda of those in power…[and] highlights systemic social analysis of the circumstances in which tragic persons struggle,” it follows to understand Luke’s primary audience. In some ways, Luke’s audience should be understood to be diverse, but there is a clear case for seeing his primary targeted audience as the more affluent and influential members of society. Sharon Ringe, for instance, argues that Luke “was a scholar with knowledge about many matters” and that he “appears to be well educated.” She believes this “places him among the elite of society, since education was not popularly available in the ancient world” and that “he also identifies his audience as part of the elite.”

Further, she makes the case that Luke appears to be writing to a particular type of affluent and influential Gentiles who would have previously been attracted to Judaism, despite not being full participants. She thinks the audience does appear to be diverse in that they were not exclusively rich (she appeals to the blessings to the poor and woes to the rich in Luke’s account of the beatitudes), but that the challenges in Luke are clearly aimed at the privileged. Ringe says Luke, “talks about the poor, but most often to the well-to-do concerning their responsibilities for the poor within the structures that still maintain some in poverty.”

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7 West, Black Prophetic Fire, 66.


9 Ringe, Way of Discipleship, 64.

10 Ringe, Way of Discipleship, 64.

11 Ringe, Way of Discipleship, 65.
The example in Luke for the contemporary intellectual moves into clarity as Luke’s agenda in his message to the affluent and influential becomes clear. His goal is to illuminate the plight of the oppressed and prophetically teach a new social order revealed by Jesus, and in doing so, call the affluent to their need to join the way of Jesus and address the systems under which the poor suffer. As mentioned before, Luke’s rendition of the beatitudes is a good place to start in seeing the challenge to the affluent (Lk. 6:20-26), but Luke’s overall teaching about the kingdom of God brings a brighter illumination to this subject. This is because Luke teaches that the way of Jesus is one of reversing the entire power structure that has determined who are the affluent and influential. Luke’s message to the affluent is in fact one of sacrifice, inherently giving up a course of personal gain. So, in order to see this example of an intellectual’s message to the affluent about the poor, it is key to look with some detail into what Luke actually highlights about Jesus’ teaching.

While Ringe and Gonzalez largely agree on the message in Luke, Gonzalez uses a phrase that best characterizes the message: “the great reversal.” Jesus teaches a reversal of this world’s corrupt power structures and re-determines what it is to be affluent and who is influential. Gonzalez shows that Luke wastes no time in driving this agenda, highlighting how the Magnificat at the beginning of the gospel is a “praise of the God who is the Lord of great upheavals” and speaks directly to God bringing down the rich and powerful and providing for the poor and hungry. Following in Luke 4, Gonzalez writes about how Jesus is seen making the elite angry because he tells them they should not expect privilege from God, and then associates with the rejected people of society throughout the following chapters. “The great reversal” is even evident in Luke’s famous parables. Gonzalez demonstrates how Jesus teaches preference in God’s Kingdom for the “poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame (Lk. 14:21),” and continually tells stories about the societal reject (The Lost Sheep, Prodigal Son) being unconditionally sought after and welcomed. This theme

persistence in additional stories (The Rich Man and Lazarus, Inclusion of the Samaritans, etc.) and in Acts as well.

One more striking example of Gonzalez’ uses of ‘the great reversal’ should not be overlooked. In Luke 13, Jesus tells the elite that they may claim to know God, but will find themselves unknown to God on the last day. “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” (Lk. 13:29-30 NIV). Then in Acts, this begins to take place in various forms in the Church, such as ethnic and religious barriers being taken down and the shift in influence in the Church moving toward Gentiles.16

So then, it is evident that Luke used his intellectual capacities to teach the new way of Jesus. Sharon Ringe sees the contemporary importance of this to intellectuals in places like the United States. She explains this concept when she states the following:

“…the opening verses and overall design of Luke’s work suggests why his project is especially important and especially challenging for us who want to live lives of justice-seeking discipleship in privileged parts of the world... [Luke is challenging the] ‘non-poor’...who have a stake in the very systems and institutions that create the suffering we deplore in our own day. To hear the Gospel as ‘good news’ calls us to a life contrary to business as usual, and contrary to what our culture identifies as our best interests.”17

In this challenge of Luke, “the intellectual” in a place like the United States can see their higher calling. The higher calling is to effectively call the non-poor to not just see the plight of the oppressed, but to see their complicity in that plight. The call is to draw the non-poor into the ‘great reversal’ of Jesus’ kingdom.

Further, this is critical for “the intellectual” because culture encourages the pursuit of personal gain with one’s talents and abilities. Intellectualism can be used to oppress others, and there are no doubt numerous career paths of power and wealth available to those who choose to employ their


17 Ringe, Way of Discipleship, 64-65.
intellect to those ends. Intellectuals can frequently find themselves complicit in systems of government, education, and other powerful institutions and structures which benefit them but harm or ignore the marginalized. “The intellectual” must reject their own temptations of this sort, embracing the way of Jesus as taught in Luke so that they may then illuminate this truth for others in the way that Luke demonstrates.

“The intellectual” is both called by Luke to embrace the new way of Jesus in their own life, and also given an example for their higher calling by the author himself. Intellectuals like Luke not only illuminate the plight of the oppressed, but call all of humankind to be disciples of Jesus in a new social order which reverses the corrupt structures of this world. The intellectual today may find many vocations, but above all they are to follow Luke’s example to use their platform to teach the affluent and influential the truth that: “His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Lk. 1:50-53). In so doing, “the intellectual” may choose a difficult path, but ultimately will have chosen Luke’s example in following the prophetic calling that God has given them.
CHRISTIAN UNITY FROM OUR FAMILIAL IDENTITY AS REALIZED IN BAPTISM, THE LORD’S PRAYER, AND COMMUNION

Alicia Janowski

In a society that is full of divisions on multiple levels, whether it is political, socioeconomic, or cultural, a church that preaches unity but is full of internal conflict might have no appeal for an outsider. Part of what it means to be a Christian is that we are united with Jesus Christ. As John Calvin writes, “As long as Christ remains outside of us…all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless…all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.” Christians are united together through their union with Christ. One of the ways in which this identity reveals itself in the Scriptures is through the concept of being adopted by God through Christ, that is, we become the children of God. I propose that a revitalized emphasis on our familial identity — our identity as brothers and sisters adopted by God who are united through Christ as realized in our Baptism, the Lord’s Prayer, and Communion — might initiate a renewed sense of unity for the global Christian Church.

Baptism

Baptism is a universal experience between Christians. While Christian baptism stands for many things and none of which are less important than another, the two below more strongly associate with our familial identity. Our baptism signifies the welcoming and entering into a new community. As it is stated in the Belgic Confession, “By [baptism] we are received into God’s church…Baptism also witnesses to us that God, being our gracious

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Father, will be our God forever”

God has adopted us into his family. Paul writes in Galatians 3:25-28 that “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons [and daughters] of God, through faith. For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ.”

Our unity to Christ is also what unites us to each other. 1 Corinthians 12:13 explains that “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body…and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” In our baptism, we are also proclaiming that we belong and are united to Christ through the Holy Spirit. Baptism— as with any other sacrament— is the sign and symbol of belonging to Christ. Together, having been baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” Christians are united to Christ. Romans 8:15b-17 says, “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons [and daughters], by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” And in Romans 6:3-4 we read, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” As one observes, our union with Christ is what unifies us together as Christians and members of the Church.

The Lord’s Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer are the words of Jesus that unite Christians in their prayers. “Since Christian prayer is our speaking to God with the very word of God, those who are [baptized]…through the living and abiding word of God, learn to invoke their Father by the one Word he always hears. They can henceforth do so, for the seal of the Holy Spirit's anointing is indelibly placed on their hearts, ears, lips, indeed their whole filial being…When the Church prays the Lord's Prayer, it is always the people made up of the

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4 See, Belgic Confession, Art. 34 in Our Faith: Ecumenical Creeds, Reformed Confessions, and Other Resources (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2013), 59.

5 Mt. 28:19 NIV
Beginning with our baptism, we are children of faith growing into maturity. “As soon as someone becomes a Christian, he or she can and must say ‘Our Father;’ that is one of the marks of grace, one of the first signs of faith. But it will take full Christian maturity to understand, and resonate with, what those words really mean.”

The Lord’s Prayer is our prayer and it unifies both our heavenly pleas and our earthly mission. It is our plea for God to provide ‘our daily bread,’ to provide for our physical need of food, but also our need to be spiritually fed and nourished. The Lord’s Prayer calls us have living faith. We pray that God may help us to avoid temptation, forgive as God forgives us, and align our hearts with the will of God, all through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. We also pray that God’s Kingdom might come not because the Kingdom has not started yet, but because there are still things that are not subject to God.

Communion

When Christians come to the Table for Communion, they are gathering with all Christians across time and space. To break the bread and drink the wine is the central act of Christianity that links us to other Christians, including Jesus Christ and his disciples on the night Jesus was betrayed. When we partake of Communion, we are joined together with Christians of the past, present, and future. It is what unites us. “Events from long ago are fused with the meal we are sharing here and now.” In addition, N.T. Wright explains that if “baptism is the way into the family;”

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7 N.T. Wright, The Lord and His Prayer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 2.

8 For the sake of simplicity, the term Communion is used here to refer to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to add extra emphasis on the community aspect of the Eucharist.

9 Communion is also a time for Christians to remember God’s promise for redemption and Christ’s sacrifice, and to eat and drink of Christ through faith is one of the means by which we receive spiritual nourishment. Cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 35.


[Communion] is the family meal.”\textsuperscript{12} Christians belong to very large family in which we all claim to belong to God, yet they live in disharmony, conflict, and misunderstanding with our brothers and sisters in different denominations and churches. But when Christians come before the Table, it acts as the great equalizer. Every member of God’s family is welcome and belongs at the Table. It is “the whole world is coming, symbolically in that bread and wine, to the foot of the cross.”\textsuperscript{13} In the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, sacrifice is a sign of reconciliation and the coming together again of God and God’s people.\textsuperscript{14} As Christians participate in the “once and for all” sacrifice in Christ, we are reunited and joined to God and to the Church as brothers and sisters.

**Christian Familial Identity**

The Christian familial identity —our identity as adopted sons and daughters of God— is not a new concept. “Brothers and sisters” or “Children of God” is frequently mentioned throughout the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament. However, aside from an occasional sermon, baptism, or theological book, this familial tie does not seem to reveal itself well in most Christian worship practices in North American churches: Baptism tends to focus on teaching about a believer’s new birth and the start of the regeneration process; the Lord’s Prayer tends to be used as a model for how to pray; and Communion tends to center on remembering Christ’s death/resurrection and being grateful for his sacrifice. I am not saying the emphases above are inadequate, but unfortunately, many congregations in our culture have strongly focused on these particular Christian worship practices without paying attentions to the other meanings of the Sacraments and Lord’s Prayer. By emphasizing only one meaning or purpose of Baptism, the Lord’s Prayer and Communion, the North American church tends to overlook the other meanings of those practices, which are also relevant for Christian life. For this reason, the church needs both/and responses.

\textsuperscript{12} Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us*, 82.

\textsuperscript{13} Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us*, 80.

What if our worship practices portray the message that as a baptized member of the church one belongs to a global Christian family with a Father who unconditionally loves His children? Baptism, then, would become a ritual of celebration where the church welcomes a person into God’s family. In doing so, the church would embrace both the baptism as new birth and gift of the Holy Spirit and a celebration ritual that marks a person as a son or daughter of God. Ephesians 4:4-6 tells us that “There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” In Christ, we are one family. Our baptismal practices bond us and mark us as God’s adopted children. Galatians 3:26-27 teaches that “in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

What if our worship practices could reflect a believer’s family identity? What if Christians were to teach that the Lord’s Prayer and Communion could be Christian practices that unify their pleas, their mission, their vision, and their hearts? The Lord’s Prayer would be a unified prayer to “Our Father.” When we pray “Give us our daily bread,” we would pray this not only for ourselves, but also for our brothers and sisters around the world. Some may be in need of physical food because they are impoverished or living under oppression. Other may be spiritually deprived because they are forbidden to read God’s Word or cannot gather to worship and partake in Communion. When we pray “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” we would be reminded of the mission Christ gives us. Christ has called us to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation,” and in doing so, spread the Kingdom of God, growing God’s family to include those “from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages” as is pictured in John’s vision of God’s Kingdom. In this, the prayer that Christ taught us to pray also unifies our pleas, our mission, and our vision. Communion teaches that as sons and daughters of God we are all equal at the Table. Paul, in 1 Corinthians, rebukes Christians for not treating everyone as equals since

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15 Mk. 16:15 NIV

16 Rev. 7:9 NIV
some came to the Table hungry and others drunk.  

He writes, “So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together,” because in this way, no one is raised above another based on wealth, position, culture, or any other matter that may otherwise separate people groups. Also, Communion is not an individual act. It is a communal worship practice which bonds us together as characters in God’s overarching story of Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration, as those who receive the New Covenant of Christ.

And what if the Church would change her missional message from “You are sinful and you will go to hell” to “In God’s Kingdom, we are a family. You are welcome into that family”? The Church’s welcome message would be transformed from “Jesus died for your sins” to “God welcomes you into His family despite your sinful past because Christ has redeemed your sinfulness and makes you holy before God.” I believe this invitation into God’s family would shift the focus from focusing exclusively on sin, eternal death, damnation, and instead would make the church a more approachable and hospitable place for the broken. When one brings the language of family into common Christian worship practices like Baptism, the Lord’s Prayer, and Communion, one renews the sense of unity with all brothers and sisters in Christ. If one sees Christians around the world as brothers and sisters, would one not hear differently the stories of them who are oppressed by corrupt governments, going unfed, being tortured for their faith? Would one not have more of, and better show our agape love to all our neighbors?

Christians are persons that make up a community. Worship is more than an individual practice. Worship reveals itself as a communal practice of the whole family of God. And it is not just those immediately around us. God’s family is a global family. When the church baptizes new members into the Church, the church welcomes them into God’s family, where they grow into maturity, and they join their brothers and sisters in growing in relationship with God. As they learn and recite the Lord’s Prayer, they hear the pleas of their brothers and sisters and become united in bringing God’s Kingdom to earth. And when they partake of Communion, they come as brothers and sisters to the family table to eat

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17 1 Cor. 11:17-34 NIV

18 1 Cor. 11:33 NIV
and drink with Christians throughout history, across the globe and those yet to come, and are renewed in Christ, whose body and blood unites us all.

Upon being welcomed into God’s family through their baptism, Christians should continue to live according to that identity since they bear the mark of being a son or daughter to God and they bear the mark of being risen in Christ. By teaching Christian familial identity, the Church also teaches unity. Living as children of God requires us to love unconditionally as a family is supposed to. It is no longer about following merely a set of cultural and ceremonial rules, but having living faith. In other words, the lives of Christians need to reflect that they believe other Christians are also God’s sons and daughters. God’s family should also show grace, mercy, and love not only when meeting the needs of others but also when proclaiming the Word of God. If the church begins to see other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ, perhaps the opposing theologies would not seem to be as significant of a barrier to worshiping, working, and serving together as one body. I think if the church could join together in being God’s Kingdom to earth, whether it is within the same neighborhood or across the globe, the amount of good that can be greatly increases. And if the church can begin to model living and working together as the family of God, perhaps, those outside God’s family will see grace, mercy, love, and desire to be part of God’s family.
PANENTHEISTIC ELEMENTS IN WOLFHART PANNENBERG’S NOTION OF GOD

Isaias D’Oleo Ochoa

Introduction

This paper will focus on the panentheistic elements found in Wolfhart Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology Vol.1* based on section 6.4 “God’s Spirituality, Knowledge, and Will” and section 6.5 “The Concept of Divine Action and the Structure of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes” respectively.¹ In his exposition, Pannenberg dialectically explores the possibility of a redefinition of the notion of God and rejects the anthropomorphic analogies and the Greek understanding of God as *nous* in order to emphasize the idea of God as Spirit and thus facilitate the intersection between the natural sciences and Christian theology. Thus, based on the Hebrew notion of the spirit as “wind/breath” and using a naturalistic framework, Pannenberg offers an insightful yet panentheistic view of the Spirit of God as a field of force that binds the Three Persons of the Trinity.

God as Reason vs. God as Spirit

Pannenberg begins section 6.4 “God’s Spirituality, Knowledge, and Will” by discussing the concept of God as a personal being in relation to his self-conscious acting. He argues that in the early stages of Christian theology God was not necessarily conceived as a “supreme, incorporeal reason.”² Pannenberg cites 1 Cor. 2:11, 2 Cor. 3:17, and John 4:24 as evidence that New Testament writers seemed to understand God as *pneuma* (spirit) and not as *nous* (reason/mind), as Philo and Middle Platonism conceived.³ Pannenberg then asserts that such a trend (the Greek notion

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of God as *nous*) was not uncommon at all because of “the emphasis on the incomparability of God with created things.” In this respect Pannenberg claims that because of the closeness of the incomparability with the incorporeality of God, it was not difficult that Christian theology could also understand God as reason, as Origen did. However, as Pannenberg also writes, “Certainly Socinian theology noted the exegetical problem of equating the biblical concept of spirit with the idea of incorporeal reason.” Among some of the explanations that support such a view, there is the fact that the Hebrew term *ruah* does not mean reason. Then Pannenberg claims that every statement of the New Testament about the Spirit must be understood according to the Jewish perspective, since the connotation of the word *ruah* as spirit/wind is not only found in Hebrew but also in Greek: *pneuma* has the connotation (at least since Anaximides) of “breath, wind, air, life-force.” This leads Pannenberg to assert that the understanding of *pneuma* as a rational or conscious spirit is linked with the [Neo] Platonic school rather than the Stoics' Pantheistic philosophy, something that favored, according to him, the transcendental view of God. Now, such a link seemed to be problematic for Pannenberg, who considers that "the identifying of *pneuma* and *nous* put theology on a path that is alien to the biblical view of God—and the path of a much too anthropomorphic view of God.” The problem with Pannenberg’s assertion here is that he does not consider whether the Spirit can be rational (both *nous* and *pneuma*) but not merely rational (only *nous*).

**Redefining the Notion of God**

Pannenberg goes on further to claim that the anthropomorphic understanding of God is product mainly of understanding God as rational

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spirit or reason, position that came to us via Anselm's heavy use of Augustine’s analogies of the Trinity and the use of Aristotelian metaphysics in High Scholasticism. With Scholasticism, the anthropomorphic view of God was strengthened and was linked to the concept of the will of God, which led “the Christian view laid itself open to serious criticism.” Because of this, Pannenberg emphasizes Spinoza’s philosophy of separating will and intellect, since for Spinoza the only way we can talk about God’s will and intellect is metaphorically. To support his position, Pannenberg briefly mentions other philosophers who, similar to Spinoza, criticized the ingrained notion of God of their time: Hume discarded the idea that God is responsible for design (something that presupposes a rational God); Fitche rejected the idea of a personal and anthropomorphic God for a divine self-consciousness; Hegel promoted the idea of God as an Absolute Spirit emerging out the world. After discussing briefly Hegel’s conception of God and his understanding of the Trinity, Pannenberg returns to the discussion with Spinoza of divine reason and reaffirms his position that one should talk of the divine intellect only metaphorically. He writes,

Those who are aware of the difficulties will have to agree with the verdict of Spinoza that it is just as metaphorical to speak of the intellect of God as to call God the “rock” of our salvation...or the “light” on our path, or to speak of the Word of God.

It is noteworthy to observe Pannenberg’s emphasis in mentioning Spinoza, Hegel, and other philosophers who worked with the notion of God were characterized by a highly-rationalized philosophy of religion. This might serve us as a hint about what Pannenberg is trying to do in this

10 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 375.
11 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 375.
12 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 375.
14 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 379.
15 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 379.
section about God’s spirituality: a redefinition of the notion of God that might work simultaneously for both natural sciences and theology.

**God's Knowledge and Will**

In regard to the divine knowledge, Pannenberg believes that the fact that God has knowledge means that all things are present to him. He states, "When we speak of God’s knowledge we mean that nothing in all his creation escapes him. All things are present to him and are kept by him in his presence. This is not necessary knowledge in the sense of what is meant by human knowledge and awareness."\(^{16}\)

In regard to God’s will, Pannenberg is of the opinion that the Old Testament "has no single concept of the will of God" but commands and a series of terms for the divine good pleasure. In the New Testament, claims Pannenberg, one finds the idea of the divine will of Jesus (cf. Matt. 6:10, 7:21, 12:50, 21:31, 26:42 and John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38-39), and notes the link between the divine word and the Spirit of God.\(^{17}\) The Spirit of God, Pannenberg adds, "finds expression in the divine good pleasure...[and] is imparted to those with whom God is well pleased."\(^{18}\) Pannenberg highlights here the connection between the will of God and the Spirit, and affirms that such a connection is consistent with the Scriptures. In this respect, he asserts that the Spirit of God is not simply *nous*, but a "creative and life-giving dynamic."\(^{19}\) Further, based on Psalm 139:7, Pannenberg creatively writes, "The Spirit is the force field of God's mighty presence."\(^{20}\) As Pannenberg affirms, his understanding contrasts with Origen's understanding of God as reason and the Stoic corporeal *pneuma* (Pantheism).

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The Spirit of God as a Field of Force

Pannenberg’s discussion provides his readers at least plausible suggestions of panentheistic elements in his theological exposition. Nonetheless, this does not mean Pannenberg embraces Panentheism in its totality, but that he strongly uses panentheistic ideas to support his theological vision. Pannenberg’s understanding of God may be of interest to Christian theology for its novelty and the doors that open. He writes, "Some astonishing possibilities thus open up for a new understanding of the relations between the trinitarian persons and the divine essence that is common to all of them" (383). Now, there are still some remarkable aspects which must be highlighted, and which illuminate us about Pannenberg’s deviation from the traditional view of God in his theological construct. By using Michael Faraday's Force Field Theory, Pannenberg presents his readers with some stimulating ideas understand God’s divine essence:

a) *The deity as field of force can find equal manifestation in all Three Persons of the Trinity.* The Spirit of God would work as a binding force of the Three Persons. In that regard, it is important to pay attention to Pannenberg's comment that says, “The trinitarian persons...are simply manifestations and [eternal] forms of the one divine essence.”21 In other words, the Three Persons of the Trinity are “modes” or manifestations of the Deity that are always actualizing themselves.

b) *The Spirit of God is the essence of God.* “The one God is the living God comes to expression in the living fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit,” Pannenberg writes. Thus, the Spirit would be the "force field of the Father and Son's fellowship."22

As seen, in Pannenberg’s argumentation, it is necessary to discard the idea of *nous* (reason/mind) as the subject of divine action. This matter is discussed in section 6.5 titled “The Concept of Divine Action and the Structure of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes.” What allows Pannenberg not to assign divine action to the Deity is his understanding


of God as the eternal divine essence which is impersonal, and not itself subject. In that respect, Pannenberg claims that only the Three Persons of the Trinity are the direct subjects of the divine action.”23 With this statement, much confusion arises concerning the personhood of the Spirit of God. Some readers might question Pannenberg’s understanding of the Spirit of God as a force field, where the Spirit’s personhood is apparently downplayed. It seems that for Pannenberg the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit are two different things.

Discussing divine action, Pannenberg affirms that action “denotes the outward activity of a will...an activity which produces effects that are different from itself...[thus] [t]he commonality of action [of the Three Persons]...can be only a manifestation of the unity of life and essence by which they are always linked already.”24 The problem of divine causality is also brought to the table: the Spirit of God seen as a field of force is incorporeal and impersonal, but it might affect the natural world. In regards to the eternal nature of God, Pannenberg understands such an attribute, as “God’s present embraces the past as well as the future.”25 In doing so, Pannenberg departed from the common Platonic understanding in early Christian theology, and instead embraced Plotinus’s view of eternity as "the presence of the totality of life."26 For Pannenberg, saying that God is eternal means that for God, all time is before him as a whole—past, present, and future. As he writes, “any span of time is simply like yesterday in the sight of God.”27 This discussion is important since for Plotinus, as Pannenberg notes, time is conceived as “the dissolution of the unity of life into a sequence of separate moments, and yet it is constituted a sequence by the references to the eternal totality”28 in contrast to the Platonic, and thus Augustinian, view of time as “a creation of God and


24 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 385.


26 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 403.


28 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 404.
thus separate from God's eternity.”

Examining this further, Pannenberg talks more about the influence of Plotinus's view of time in Boethius (though he does not endorse it) and goes on critically with Barth’s understanding of the eternity of God and the relation between the concept of time, eternity as divine attribute, and the Trinity.

Usefulness of Plotinus’s Conception of Time

Noteworthy to mention is Pannenberg’s comment on Plotinus's concept of time and its potential usefulness for Christian theology: He states,

Christian theology let slip the chance to combine NT eschatology and the understanding of God's eternity with the help of Plotinus's analysis of time...In the future of the divine rule the life of creation will be renewed for participation in the eternity of God. In it eternity comes together with time.... It is the place of eternity itself...the source of the mighty working of his Spirit.

Therefore, world history is for Pannenberg of high interest because it is a means where God is manifested and actualized. Besides, for Pannenberg the future seems not to be actual but a possibility. Having this in view, history would be “the path that leads to the future of God’s glory.” Thus, “[t]he past remains present to the eternal God and the future is already present to him.” Pannenberg asserts that the divine presence fills everything, heaven and earth, in the sense that such a presence “permeates and comprehends all things.” This idea of permeability of God’s presence might resemble, at least indirectly, pantheistic ideas that the divine is

29 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 404.
31 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 408-09.
33 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 410.
34 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol.1, 411.
present in all and in everything all the time, though one should consider that this point could also be made from classical theism as well.

**Other Reflections about the Spirit**

In Vol.2 of his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg asserts again that “[t]he Spirit of God is the creative principle of movement as well as life.”\(^{35}\) One sees here a reinforcement of Pannenberg's panentheistic understanding of the Spirit. For Pannenberg while the Holy Spirit is personal, the Spirit of God is, instead, an impersonal field force.\(^ {36}\) In this respect he states, “the person of the Holy Spirit is one of the personal concentrations of the essence of God as Spirit in distinction from the Father and the Son. The person of the Holy Spirit is not himself to be understood as the field but as a unique manifestation (singularity) of the field of the divine essentiality.”\(^ {37}\)

Even though Pannenberg clarifies some points about the distinction between the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit in his theology, I find that his position might still arise at least some ambiguity regarding the personhood of Spirit: God’s Spirit is both the Holy Spirit (the Third Person of the Trinity/a concrete manifestation of the Spirit of God) and a field of force that binds the Trinity (God’s divine essence).

**Conclusion**

Pannenberg tries to dehellenize Christian theology by rejecting the Greek understanding of God as *nous* (reason/mind) and rescuing the Hebrew idea of *ruah* as “wind/breath.” Although Pannenberg’s theology is innovative and brings significant insight into Christian theology, such insights regrettably have a cost: First, although many scholars consider that Pannenberg is not trying to promote a panentheistic understanding of God, his view of God sometimes seems to resemble Panentheism in several areas —his concept of time, history, and God (cf. Plotinus’ view of God as the One, Reason, and Spirit). Second, even more serious is the


tension in Pannenberg’s theology between his notion of God as field force and the notion of God traditionally found in early Christian theology. This tension makes Pannenberg’s theological vision to be susceptible to a series of questions regarding the plausibility and coherence of his arguments and ideas. One of the areas of concern I find, for instance, is the downplay of the personhood of the God alongside his appropriation of the natural sciences —the Field Force Theory—in theology. I ask, if the Spirit is both an impersonal field force and a personal manifestation of the Trinity, how can we know with certainty who the Spirit really is? It seems that Pannenberg collects divergent pieces from different areas of study in order to construct his theological view of the Spirit: He rejects the Greek notion of God as nous, but at the same time, he uses a lot of Plotinus’s Pantheistic material where the concept of nous is central. He tries to rescue the Hebrew notion of God as Spirit in Christian theology by discarding the Greek notion of God as reason/mind, but at the same time, there is a strong rationalization in his theology of the Spirit, which it is alien to the Hebrew thought. Besides, Pannenberg is oblivious that the Hebrew term ruah does not only mean “wind/breath,” but it also refers to “God, spirits, gods, and so on.”

Overall, Pannenberg’s exposition of his theology of the Spirit and the divine attributes does not reduce Christian theology to natural sciences, though Pannenberg does strongly rationalize the theistic understanding of God. If Pannenberg wanted to establish a notion of God that works simultaneously for both classical theism and science, he would have been better off focusing on a notion of God that might understand the Spirit as both pneuma (life-force) and nous (reason/mind).
JOHN W. COOPER AND THE REASONS HE DOES NOT EMBRACE PANENTHEISM

Brent McCulley

The following exposition is about John W. Cooper’s theological and philosophical reasons why he does not embrace Christian Panentheism as expounded in Chapter 14: “Why I Am Not a Panentheist” of his book Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers. John W. Cooper, professor of Philosophical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, is convinced that the history of philosophy as taught in the academies contains a more unknown B-side, as it were, which has now come to be known as Panentheism. His book, Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers stands as the first modern history of Panentheism from Plato up to the present time. While the history of Panentheism is fascinating, Dr. Cooper—writing out of the Dutch Reformed tradition—is not convinced that it offers a better model to what is generally called Classical Theism. In the closing chapter of his book, he offers an excursus to his readers about why he is not a panentheist.

In the opening paragraph, the plurality of perspectives, Cooper lays his cards face up on the table, admitting, fairly yet unapologetically, that he is approaching his critique of Panentheism from a Reformed perspective: the Western line of thought that stands in the tradition of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin. More than that, he stands in the tradition of theology that is committed to a confession, a particular set of theological standards that give the Reformed its characteristic distinctiveness. The Three Forms of Unity and Westminster Standards are examples of these. Cooper is not hesitant to openly admit that he is approaching his positive theology from the classical theistic standpoint, despite its current unpopularity. Therefore, he acts as a model that should be emulated since often times we are wont to concealing our cards, especially when we are the ones who are serving the theological critique. Those who identify with Cooper's presuppositions behoove themselves in following his judicious approach in defending classical theism as well as critiquing panentheistic theology. Thus, he can state, “I am prepared to consider revisions and alternatives to classical theism that are consistent with biblical and confessional teaching. I am

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1 John W. Cooper, Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).
open to regarding properly nuanced trinitarian panentheism as authentic Christian theology even though I cannot endorse it.”  

The even-handedness of Cooper’s approach is noteworthy at a minimum.

The survey up until this chapter was instructive in its historical insight but further enabled Cooper to draw distinctions, create new categories, and carefully redefine various terms that hitherto created ambiguity. Cooper further wants to clarify the theological position that he is leveling his critique of Panentheism from. He lists classical theism, modified Christian theism, revised classical theism, Christian panentheism, and non-Christian panentheism. The first is the Augustinian-Scottish Western theological heritage on which he stands. Modified Christian theists are those who may perhaps modify one or more classical theological positions—like putting God in time—but otherwise are very classical and orthodox. Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig would be examples of this: committed to classical theism but working from the framework of analytical philosophy. Revised Christian theism are those who change enough of the classical framework that it warrants a new category. Open theists in the likeness of Greg Boyd fit nicely into this category. Last, we have the Christian and non-Christian forms of panentheism which were explored throughout the duration of the book. The best form of Christian panentheism would probably be Teilhard de Chardin’s “Christocentric Panentheism.” While Teilhard cannot escape the accusation of Panentheism, his theology as a whole is very much orthodox and, for the most part, in line with Catholic dogma. The best example of the non-Christian form of Panentheism is probably Alfred North Whitehead’s “Process Philosophy” which does not really seem to care too much about Christian categories. The fundamental difference between the two is that the Christian forms stress Trinity and Incarnation of Jesus whereas the non-Christian forms do not. The distinctions that remain derived by Cooper are as follows: “personal and non-personal, part-whole and relational, natural and/or voluntary, and classical (divine determinist) and modern (cooperative Panentheism).” The categories are helpful in that

2 Cooper, Panentheism, 321.

3 Cf. Cooper, Panentheism, 148-64.


5 Cooper, Panentheism, 321.
they allow Cooper to speak with more precision when discussing panentheistic models, wherein there is much diversity, and grant him the leverage for a more accurate critique of the various panentheistic models.

Fundamental to the critique of Panentheism is the understanding of God, the world, and the relationship therewith. The four of relevance are listed by Cooper as “being in God, God's activity in the world, God's ontological relation to the world, and the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Paul does say in the Scriptures that we have our being in God (Acts 17:28), yet classical theists have always understood this to be true as well, albeit in a much different way than panentheists understand it. Further, many panentheists are relational, like Moltmann, and offer arguments that cannot simply be dismissed by classical theism. Wanting a God that is more relational has prompted men like Moltmann to develop his entire project about a God who suffers with us. Ensuring God's true response has prompted many to place God back “in time” like many of the modified classical theism theologies offered by men like William Lane Craig. Last, open-theists who are in the revised classical theism camp have largely re-written God’s knowledge of future or contingent events thereby ensuring human liberty and God's responsive love and action.

There is no doubt that Christians want a God who responds and is near to them. While this does seem to be one of the driving forces of modern theologies, for those who have a proper understanding of the asymmetrical relationship of God to creation, they have no problem with affirming the simple, eternal, immutable God of classical theism, and even forms of classical panentheism like Schleiermacher’s God (in that his God cannot be affected by creation, as in classical theism). It does seem that when panentheistic theologies put God ontologically in the world, he becomes “nearer” in a very real locative sense, but not necessarily “nearer” in the ontological sense, because now God ontologically consists of something that you also are a part of. The God of classical theism, when properly understood, has the best of both worlds because it protects God's transcendence and has God more immanent than many panentheistic theologies. Because God is not constrained by anything outside himself,

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6 Cooper, *Panentheism*, 322.

7 Cooper, *Panentheism*, 323.
he can relate asymmetrically to the created order in a way that he is everywhere fully present, but not constrained nor consisted of the created order, since he infinitely transcends it. Cooper states, “God's actual supernatural existence infinitely transcends his immanence in the world...[therefore] it makes no sense to speak of ontological proportion or “balance” between transcendence and immanence.”

Moltmann and Pannenberg want God to still be infinitely transcendent, but locate this in the future. This is odd and counter intuitive to every day experience, like Whitehead's understanding of actual occasions and causality. This seems to create more problems than it solves. I believe that Cooper's assessment of the immanent/transcendent balance to be accurate of all Panentheism no matter the stripe. Since all Panentheism has God ontologically as a part of the world, He suffers. In that regard, Cooper states, “God is only relatively immanent because he is only relevantly transcendent.” Given the very nature of Panentheism, this is a hurdle that it can never surmount.

In regard to the Trinity, many panentheists seem to show their true colors when they stand in line of Jakob Böhme over St. Augustine. The philosophies of Hegel and Shelling draw their source material from Plato's *Timaeus*, Gnostic literature, and Pseudo-Dionysius, not from Scripture. That the Trinitarian formula took time to develop in the Church there is no doubt. That Trinity is best described as eternal-dialectic, negative and positive potencies, light and darkness, infinite and abyss, etc., is dubious at best, and at worst is heretical, unorthodox, Gnostic, and philosophical speculation that leaps far beyond what the Scriptures have revealed. Another issue is about God's self-sufficiency and the creation a free act. Panentheists are alike when they either have to say that it was necessary for God, or that it was a free act of God that he could not avoid (compatibilism), which also seems to have problems when it stands over against classical theism which states strongly a sovereign God who can create or not create. Cooper rightly judges when he asserts that “divine freedom is an oxymoron in almost all panentheism.”

8 Cooper, *Panentheism*, 328.


10 Cooper, *Panentheism*, 326.
sovereignty and freedom of choice in God, they ought to stay in the classical reformed theological camp. Related to this is the idea of the immutability of God. This is a hot-button issue for many Christians, many of whom have adopted positions that state God is not fully immutable, and many of these are not panentheists at all. The end of the matter boils down to how one approaches the biblical material: either with the presupposition that God as the Almighty is immutable, or that God can be affected in some way by his creatures. The latter does not necessarily make one a panentheist, but if the latter approach is taken, panentheism is a better camp, just not classical panentheism which still holds to a strong form of immutability, albeit not the absolute philosophical definition of immutability. However, Cooper is not convinced that panentheism is a better position to take since the classical theistic understanding always held that “simplicity [is defined] not from absolute identity but from self-sufficiency [aseity].”¹¹ This means that included in God’s self-sufficiency is God’s sovereign choice to create or not to create. God is ontologically simple, not composed of parts, but he is not philosophically simple (Spinoza). One of the biggest problems is the actualization of the Trinity for panentheists, given their schema, the Trinity—if one is present—is never fully actual until the eschaton. That is, “God's actual existence is not yet fully three or one.”¹² This hardly makes better sense of the biblical data than classical theism.

One of the biggest problems for Christian panentheists is that because the world is in God ontologically, sin, evil, and death are also in God ontologically. This seems to destroy the biblical language of Scripture which asserts that God is wholly other, holy, and untainted by anything in the created order. Either in the stripe of Hegel (dialectical necessity) or pinned down on humans in their will or finitude (later Schelling and Moltmann), panentheism of this order has to assert that such came about necessarily in creation, and because all panentheism suffers from making the world inevitable and necessary (even in compatibilism), it would seem that evil becomes inevitable. If Calvinists have traditionally been accused of making the Fall necessary, panentheists have an even bigger hurdle to clear in order to justify their theodicy. What is worse, some panentheists

¹¹ Cooper, Panentheism, 327.

¹² Cooper, Panentheism, 329.
go further than the language of Hegel (finite spirit is by its very nature evil) and speak of darkness, evil, the demonic, in the essence of God. This runs counter to the biblical witness and stands in the tradition of Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism, not the biblical God. Thus, Cooper correctly concludes that “no variety of panentheism can acknowledge the perfect holiness of God as classical theism can.”

Conclusion

While Panentheism claims to offer the best via media and most viable theological option in our current climate, Dr. Cooper is not convinced that it solves any more problems than classical theism is able to solve. Of the most pressing issues, the ideas that God must relate to us in a new way, or that God suffers, seem to be some of the more existential motivators that propel people into Christian Panentheism. Nonetheless, I agree with Cooper that people should stay with Classical theism for a God who is more relational and more immanent than is offered in Panentheism. Given his treatment and brief critique, the biggest obstacles for Christian Panentheism are justifying evil ontologically in God, making creation ontologically necessary for God, and making God only relatively relational. Thus, Dr. Cooper offers an insightful yet even-handed concluding critique of Panentheism, carefully taking into account the diversity of opinion among the panentheists. If the God of Classical theism is charged with being “The God of the philosophers” then Cooper's assessment is correct in labeling Panentheism the “Other God of the philosophers.”

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13 Cooper, *Panentheism*, 332.
ARTICLES

HERESY, MISREPRESENTATION, AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST: A CRITIQUE OF PAUL MOLNAR’S ASSESSMENT OF ROGER HAITHT

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Keywords: Christology, the Resurrection of Christ, Nestorianism, Paul Molnar.

Introduction

Since its publication in 1999, Roger Haight’s work *Jesus: Symbol of God* has evoked a lot of strong reaction. Some of this reaction has been positive, wherein Haight has garnered appreciation for his views.¹ Much of this reaction, however, has been fairly negative. Haight claims in his book that he is being faithful to the Christological pronouncements of Nicaea and Chalcedon,² but several critics over the years have charged him with

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inconsistency, claiming that *Jesus: Symbol of God* does not in fact agree with classical Christological positions.\(^3\)

One reviewer in particular has not only viewed Haight as being inconsistent with Nicaea and Chalcedon, but has also accused him of being heretical. In his book *Incar- nation and Resurrection: Toward a Contemporary Understanding*, Paul Molnar critiques the Christology of Haight, as well as ten other contemporary theologians. The meat of Molnar’s critique is really no more than ten pages in length, but in this relatively short space Molnar brands several elements of Haight’s Christology as definitively rooted in early Christian heresy. Specifically, Molnar identifies Haight’s treatment of the resurrection of Christ as Nestorian in nature.

Molnar’s charge of Nestorian heresy to Haight’s Christology is bold and straightforward; his demonstration of this charge, however, is not as forthcoming. Molnar interacts with Haight by analyzing several quotations from *Jesus: Symbol of God* in order to prove the presence of Nestorianism in Haight’s understanding of Christ’s resurrection. But Molnar’s practice of quoting Haight is selective and often ignores the surrounding context of his words. What becomes apparent in examining Molnar’s critique of Haight regarding the resurrection of Christ is his disconcerting marriage of solid theological analysis of Haight’s views with an uncharitable practice of theological name-calling, which ultimately avoids clarifying the nature of

Christ’s resurrection in *Jesus: Symbol of God*. Through an extensive comparison of Molnar’s citations of Haight and the fuller context of Haight’s own words, I intend to demonstrate that Molnar misinterprets and significantly misrepresents Haight’s views on Christ’s resurrection by too-quickly labeling Haight’s views as Nestorian.

I. Molnar’s Presentation of Haight’s Views on Christ’s Resurrection

Molnar makes it very clear what his overarching purpose is in analyzing and evaluating the Christologies of various Christian theologians: to demonstrate the necessity of holding a consistent Christology. “In the course of this discussion,” states Molnar, “I hope to develop the thesis that incarnation and resurrection are so closely related that if one is compromised in the slightest way then so too is the other.”

Molnar, drawing extensively on David Fergusson’s reflection on the resurrection, claims that contemporary interpretations of Christ’s resurrection fall into three basic categories: the radical view, which claims that belief in Christ’s resurrection originated with the psychology of the disciples’ faith; the liberal view, which maintains that faith in Christ’s resurrection takes place within the community of faith; and the traditional view, which believes that the resurrection was a historical event in the life of Christ and was responsible for producing faith in the disciples. This three-category model is explicitly chosen by Molnar in order to inform and guide his evaluation of select theologians’ Christologies, so as to show that it is necessary “that the same unique subject who was active in the incarnation remains active in the resurrection and beyond as the ascended Lord of the church and world.”

With respect to Haight, Molnar quickly orients his readers to how Haight thinks of Christ’s resurrection. Molnar points out that, according to Haight’s own words, the resurrection of Christ

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5 Molnar, *Incarnation and Resurrection*, ix-x.

need not entail the assumption of his physical corpse...the idea of the disappearance of Jesus’ body is a way of signifying that the integral person, Jesus of Nazareth, was resurrected...But the resurrection... does not require the disappearance of Jesus’ corpse. Identifying the resurrection with the empirical disappearance of the body of Jesus may be seen as a category mistake that tends to distort the symbol.7

Molnar maintains that it is clear Haight does not believe in Christ’s resurrection according to the traditionalist category.8 Having established this point, Molnar proceeds to examine Haight’s treatment of Christ’s resurrection,9 his incarnation,10 the Trinity in the life of Christ,11 and the relationship between Christ and salvation,12 in this order. For the purposes of this essay, it is the resurrection of Christ that will be the focus of our examination of Molnar’s critique of Haight.

In assessing Haight’s position on the resurrection of Christ, Molnar considers two questions and interacts with a litany of quotations from Jesus: Symbol of God. The first question which Molnar seeks to answer is, “What then is the nature of the resurrection [for Haight]?”13 Molnar finds the position in Haight’s Christology that “we can approach the resurrection obliquely on the basis of the New Testament witness to this faith-hope and its object by means of an inquiry into the human experience that generated the initial conviction that Jesus was alive with God.”14 Molnar understands this to indicate that Haight believes what originally caused belief in Christ’s resurrection among his disciples was not his actual, bodily resurrection, but was instead “a human experience of faith-hope.”15 This interpretation is supported in Molnar’s mind by the fact that, according to

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7 Haight, Jesus, 125, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 233-234.
8 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 234.
9 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 234-236.
10 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236-239.
13 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 234.
14 Haight, Jesus, 129, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 234.
15 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
Haight, Christ’s resurrection “does not support the necessity of an empty tomb in principle.”

The rationale Molnar is able to find for Haight’s position is based on what he believes is his denial of the historicity of the resurrection of Christ on the level of a Bultmannian interpretation of Easter. Quoting Haight, Molnar presents Haight’s view this way: “One cannot know concretely how the disciples experienced Jesus as risen...The stories of the apparitions...are not reports of events as they happened...They were created afterwards as expressions of faith.” Therefore, the resurrection cannot be affirmed as “a piece of objective information” about Jesus. Indeed, claims Molnar, Haight believes that “it is not the case that the affirmation ‘Jesus is risen’ could only be true if Jesus were ‘physically’ encountered or the tomb were really empty.” According to his presentation of Haight’s view, it is evident that Molnar believes the nature of Christ’s resurrection in Haight’s Christology is not that of historical event in the incarnate life of Christ, but is instead a religious experience in the lives of his disciples that is distinct from him.

Molnar’s second question is, “What was it then that objectively mediated this religious experience for the disciples?” The blunt answer which Molnar gives, citing Haight, is: “Jesus himself during his ministry...after his death, the disciples’ memory of Jesus filled this role.” Molnar believes that what Haight does with the resurrection of Christ is to center its origin in the minds, memories, and hopes of his disciples, maintaining, “It is enough to realize that he [Haight] has presented a view of the resurrection that is at variance with the traditional one that sees the resurrection as an event in the life of Jesus that gives meaning to the

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16 Haight, Jesus, 134, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
17 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
18 Haight, Jesus, 136, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
19 Haight, Jesus, 141, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
20 Haight, Jesus, 145-146, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
21 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
22 Haight, Jesus, 141, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
disciples’ faith and to ours.” Molnar recognizes that this is the case for Haight because, as Haight himself says, “Jesus’ life, what he said and did, is the center of faith. Jesus’ ministry and message mediate a revelation of God” in such a way that Christian faith would be substantially the same if there “had been no explicit experience of resurrection.”

This conception of Christ’s resurrection is obviously problematic for Molnar. For Molnar, Christ “did not mediate a revelation of God,” nor was he just “a symbol of God.” Christ in the New Testament is “the Word incarnate, the Revealer of God. He was the one Mediator.” Consequently, Christ must be seen as the one who determines the meaning of his own resurrection, rather than other peoples’ so-called experiences of his resurrection or what his resurrection may or may not mean to them. It is exactly at this point that Molnar’s evaluation of Haight takes a sudden and abrupt turn. As far as Molnar is concerned, the reason Haight comes to these conclusions about Christ’s resurrection is because “Haight’s very thinking, which claims to be historical, is not shaped by the Jesus of the NT [sic] but is instead shaped by his Nestorian separation of Jesus’ divinity and humanity at exactly the point where faith would require that they be seen as one.”

Interlude: Defining Nestorianism

Molnar’s contention that Haight is Nestorian in his perspective on Christ’s resurrection raises three issues that need clarification. First, and perhaps most puzzling, Molnar arrives at his conclusion that Haight’s views are Nestorian by examining what Haight says about Christ’s resurrection. The incarnation of Christ, rather than his resurrection, has been the traditional theological locus for determining whether or not a position is Nestorian. While he specifically critiques Haight’s understanding of

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23 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
24 Haight, Jesus, 150, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
25 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
26 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236; italics original.
27 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
28 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
29 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236.
Christ’s incarnation in a separate section, at no time when dealing with Haight’s position on the incarnation does Molnar draw any conclusions or even seek to suggest that this also shows Nestorian influence. 30 One would think that the issue of the incarnation of Christ’s person, to which Nestorianism as a fifth century Christological controversy focused, would be where Molnar would mine in order to demonstrate Haight’s Nestorianism. The resurrection of Christ, while not outside the purview of his person and incarnation, seems like the wrong place to primarily ground the task of uncovering Nestorianism in a theologian’s thought.

Second, the passages Molnar quotes from Jesus: Symbol of God, which supposedly support his position that Haight’s treatment of Christ’s resurrection is Nestorian, are odd choices. It is true that the quotations which Molnar chooses from Haight’s work do not show his Christology in a very orthodox light. If Molnar’s basic interpretation of this material is correct, Haight’s Christology—especially regarding the resurrection of Christ—necessarily seems to be a substantial redefinition of classical Christology. Nevertheless, the quotations which Molnar marshals from Haight’s book do not appear to demonstrate the Nestorianism which he believes is present—at least, not in the blatant way that Molnar’s direct-though-offhanded labeling of Haight seems to suggest.

Finally, Molnar is unclear about the elements in Haight’s Christology that qualify as Nestorianism. Molnar makes a brief reference to division between Christ’s divinity and humanity in Haight’s thought, which could serve well enough as an implicit definition of Nestorianism. But Molnar has shown alarming signs of scholarly indiscretion by failing to clearly identify the Nestorianism present in material he cites from Haight, as well as in his bizarre practice of locating this Nestorianism in Haight’s articulation of Christ’s resurrection. It begs the question, therefore, whether Molnar’s tacit operating definition of Nestorianism aligns with the basic positions that scholars have identified as constituting de facto Nestorianism. I believe it is necessary to briefly define the normative characteristics of Nestorianism as understood by the scholarly community before analyzing Molnar’s evaluation of Haight. This will help to clarify what should and should not be considered Nestorianism.

30 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 236-239.
Richard Norris, in his brief introduction to a collection of anthologized, translated texts in classical Christology, claims that the main issue in Nestorius’ Christology was the identification of the subject in Jesus Christ—either the divine Logos or the man Jesus of Nazareth. In an attempt to guard the deity of the Logos, Nestorius inevitably separated the human person of Jesus from the divine Logos. Nestorius maintained that it was not the Logos who was born of Mary but the human Jesus; likewise, it was not the Logos who suffered, died, and was raised, but the human Jesus. This separation of the human and the divine in Jesus Christ inevitably resulted in the positing of two distinct centers of consciousness in Jesus of Nazareth: the human on the one hand and the divine on the other, which had joined itself to his human person at birth. If this were not the case, in Nestorius’ view, the humanity and divinity in Jesus would have to be seen as mixed together and muddled; this, in turn, would necessarily alter the Logos’ deity, cause the divine Logos to undergo a change from what it was to what it was not, and consequently preserve neither Jesus’ humanity nor divinity.

Norris is not the only scholar who understands and articulates Nestorius’ Christological positions in this way. Several specialist works in various aspects of fifth century Christology, highly respected general histories of patristic theology, and general treatments of the history of

34 Norris, “Introduction,” 27.
35 Norris, “Introduction,” 27.
Christian thought\textsuperscript{38} summarize Nestorianism in a similar fashion. There are, to be fair, a few theological specialists and generalists who disagree with this understanding of Nestorianism, and who consequently argue for a less prejudiced reading of Nestorius.\textsuperscript{39} However, the exact nature of fifth century Nestorianism is not the issue here. What the majority of these scholars have described and agree on is a basic framework of Nestorian Christology, a framework which most contemporary theologians can safely assume as definitive Nestorianism until further notice. With this in mind, we can examine the context of the quotations which Molnar gleans from Jesus: Symbol of God as support for his ascription of Nestorianism to Haight, and thus better determine the legitimacy of Molnar’s Nestorian characterization of Haight’s Christology.

\textbf{II. Assessing Molnar’s Interpretation of Haight’s Nestorianism}

Molnar groups quotations from Jesus: Symbol of God around two overarching questions, one that inquiries into the nature of Christ’s resurrection in Haight’s thought and another that asks what Haight identified as providing the disciples with the experience of Christ’s resurrection. This order has already been discussed in the previous section on Molnar’s interpretation of Haight; the present section will examine each quotation individually. Since Molnar attempts to marshal specific material


from Haight in order to prove his interpretation of Haight’s Nestorian view on Christ’s resurrection, what is essential is to understand the way he uses and interprets each quotation from Haight’s work in order to establish his case.

2.1 Haight: Jesus’ Life in the Realm of the Transcendent

In his analysis of Haight’s understanding of Christ’s resurrection, Molnar first discusses Haight’s conception of the nature of that resurrection: whether or not he views the resurrection as a historical event in the life of Jesus. As far as Molnar is convinced, Haight simply believes that “we can approach the resurrection obliquely on the basis of the New Testament witness to this faith-hope and its object by means of an inquiry into the human experience that generated the initial conviction that Jesus was alive with God.”

Molnar’s presentation of Haight’s view, however, is misleading. It represents Haight as being primarily subjectivist in his approach to Christ’s resurrection, but the larger context is not as clear-cut as Molnar’s version of Haight’s view would initially have us believe. Here is the context of the statement Molnar uses from Haight, with the material that Molnar cites placed in italics:

To sum up this first stage of our discussion of the resurrection, this symbol is not to be understood in imaginative categories as something that occurs within the concrete environment of our everyday world. The imagination accompanies all understanding, and it inevitably causes difficulties when applied to this transcendent reality. It is not the imagination that ties human conception to sensible data, but the imagination that constructs new possibilities of being that informs the concept of resurrection. Resurrection should be conceived as belonging to the transcendent sphere, an object of faith-hope which is that of God. But at the same time, we can approach the resurrection obliquely on the basis of the New Testament witness to this faith-hope and its object by means of an inquiry into the human experience that generated the initial conviction that Jesus was alive with God.

Within this paragraph, Haight is providing a summary of several of his preceding thoughts, as indicated by the words “to sum up this first stage.”

40 Haight, Jesus, 129, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 234.

41 Haight, Jesus, 129.
Further, this summarization identifies a tension between “the imagination that ties human conception to sensible data” and the resurrection “as belonging to the transcendent sphere.” The meaning which Haight attaches to these two concepts is found in the previous pages.

As a transcendent reality, Haight understands the resurrection of Christ as operating beyond temporal, human experience. Christ’s resurrection “is an indescribable and unimaginable transcendent reality.”[^42] In terms of what happened to Christ, it can only be seen as “exaltation or glorification,”[^43] as the reality “that Jesus lives in God’s glory.”[^44] Such language could initially indicate that Haight believes in an actual resurrection of Christ, due to the fact that the language of glorification is fairly traditional terminology used to describe the theological meaning and historical reality of Christ’s resurrection—which Haight himself acknowledges.[^45] Nevertheless, as will become evident when examining his understanding of “the transcendent,” Haight uses this language in what he terms “symbolic” ways that inform our understanding of the human experience of God.

The transcendent reality to which Christ’s resurrection points, according to Haight, can be comprehended by human experience through approaching Jesus’ life and experiences analogically.[^46] The link between Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of believers in 1 Corinthians 15 is what convinces Haight that the reality of Christ’s person and life can be experienced by humans, and that at the same time the reality of God which Christ’s person and life convey to humans remains distinct from believers.[^47] As a symbol, the resurrection of Christ points away from the historical elements that define this world and to the transcendent sphere of God.[^48] In this way, the resurrection is a statement about the uniqueness of Christ vis-à-vis the divinely transcendent; however, it is also not

[^42]: Haight, Jesus, 126.
[^43]: Haight, Jesus, 128.
[^44]: Haight, Jesus, 128-129.
[^45]: Haight, Jesus, 122-123.
[^46]: Haight, Jesus, 127.
[^47]: Haight, Jesus, 127-128.
[^48]: Haight, Jesus, 123-124.
informed and cannot be addressed by empirical sense data, precisely because Christ’s resurrection is a symbolic mediation of God to the world rather than an event in the world. Thus, Haight is able to conclude that Christ conveys the reality of divine transcendence to humans through the symbol of his resurrection. This reality, in turn, is received and entered into by human experiences of this divine transcendence in the Jesus whom the disciples knew. Further, the religious experiences of the disciples are made accessible to Christians in every age, because Christian experience is dependent on the original disciples’ experiences of God, as conveyed through their interactions with the historical Jesus.

Such thinking begs further clarification on Haight’s part, especially regarding a more precise understanding of the identity of this divine transcendence to which Christ is connected and the way in which symbols appear to operate as surrogates for events in Christ’s life. These issues notwithstanding, the Nestorianism that we are looking for in this passage seems to be lacking. The focus of Haight’s attention in this passage is less on dividing the person of Christ between his constituent deity and humanity, and more on placing the entirety of his life and person squarely in the realm of the divine transcendent, whatever the transcendent ultimately is for Haight.

2.2 Haight: Christ’s Resurrection and the Human Experience of God

Haight’s further treatment of the historicity of Christ’s resurrection, however, does partially support Molnar’s contention that Haight does not posit the resurrection as an actual event that took place in the life of Christ. According to Molnar, Haight insists that his conception of the resurrection “does not support the necessity of an empty tomb in principle.” The larger context, however, again demonstrates that Haight’s thought is not

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49 Haight, Jesus, 124.
50 Haight, Jesus, 128.
51 Haight, Jesus, 128-129.
52 Haight, Jesus, 129.
53 Haight, Jesus, 134, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
as simplistic as Molnar makes it seem. Here is the context of Haight’s words, with the material Molnar cites in italics:

And again, apart from the fact that my understanding of the resurrection does not support the necessity of an empty tomb in principle, it must be said that history cannot determine the authenticity of these accounts [in the Gospels]. But neither can history disprove an empty tomb, and a number of exegesis support its historicity...But what is at stake here is not the fact of an empty tomb, which in itself is quite distinct from resurrection, but whether the resurrection of Jesus requires it. As far as I can see, the strongest argument against such a necessity rests upon the analogy of Jesus’ resurrection with that of others, as it is reflected in 1 Corinthians 15.\(^{54}\)

While Molnar correctly quotes Haight as maintaining that Christ’s resurrection doesn’t necessarily have to be an event that occurred in real time and space, the context of this assertion indicates that the historicity of the resurrection is not the subject of Haight’s focus at this point in his book. What serves as the center of Haight’s concern regarding the empty tomb and matters of historicity with respect to the resurrection of Christ is the identification of the basis of faith that Christ was resurrected. After making clear that he believes the issue is not one of historicity of the resurrection but what the grounds are for us believing in Christ’s resurrection, only then does Haight identify what he believes must be that basis of faith in the resurrection of Christ: it is the experience of God which the disciples had through Jesus.\(^{55}\) According to Haight, the disciples used the concept of resurrection to articulate and explain the reality of God which they had encountered in Christ, and this concept helped them make sense of and communicate their faith in Jesus and his current association with God.\(^{56}\) Haight emphasizes that the disciples’ belief in Christ’s resurrection indicates that they already had this level of faith in Christ before the Easter event; for him, something prior to Easter must have instilled in the disciples a substantial faith in Christ and his resurrection.\(^{57}\)

\(^{54}\) Haight, Jesus, 134.

\(^{55}\) Haight, Jesus, 135.

\(^{56}\) Haight, Jesus, 135-136.

\(^{57}\) Haight, Jesus, 135.
Clearly, Haight is not concerned with establishing whether or not there was an empty tomb. For him, the emptiness or fullness of the tomb is irrelevant in saying anything about Christ or his resurrection. Haight is more interested in demonstrating that belief in Christ’s resurrection is not dependent on historical and temporal human events, but on human experience of his transcendence. His earlier thinking regarding the connection between Christ’s resurrection and our resurrection, between Christ’s communication of divine transcendence and our reception and experience of that transcendence in and through him, informs his treatment of the empty tomb. While Molnar rightly takes issue with the epistemologically lackluster place which the empty tomb has in Haight’s understanding of Christ’s resurrection, Molnar has done nothing definitive or clear to demonstrate that Haight makes this move because of any Nestorianism present in his thought.

2.3 Haight: The Basis for Belief in Christ’s Resurrection

Molnar also takes issue with Haight’s apparently unilateral conclusion that the resurrection of Christ gives us no definitive information about him. Bluntly stated, Molnar claims that Christ’s resurrection is unable to be “a piece of objective information” for Haight.\(^\text{58}\) This, however, is a misleading presentation of Haight’s view. The wider context, in which Molnar’s citation of Haight’s words is again placed in italics, shows that Haight’s understanding of the objective nature of the resurrection of Christ is far more nuanced than Molnar would have us believe:

The affirmation that Jesus is risen is an object of faith-hope. It arises out of a participatory or engaged experience of transcendence, and is not \textit{a piece of objective information}. As such, like all matters of faith, it is revealed; it is given to human awareness through a religious experience taken to be revelatory. But all revelation is mediated to human experience through an external medium or datum which symbolically represents the content of revelation. Revelation is not purely a-historical inner communication of God to an individual consciousness. One has to ask about the external medium, the external thing, event, or situation which gave rise to an awareness of Jesus’ resurrection.\(^\text{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Molnar, \textit{Incarnation and Resurrection}, 235.

\(^{59}\) Haight, \textit{Jesus}, 141.
There are many questions raised as to the meaning of some of Haight’s terminology in this passage. Regarding the maintenance that Christ’s resurrection does not provide us with objective information about him, as well as the three-fold belief that the resurrection is a part of divine revelation, a matter of faith, and is in some way a participatory experience of the transcendent, there exists a palpable discrepancy between what can theologically be said about Christ and what is actually experienced through Christ. Molnar has highlighted this discrepancy and he is right to do so. What is unambiguous about Haight’s meaning in this passage, however, is his unwillingness to simply throw out Christ’s resurrection as telling us nothing at all. Haight straightforwardly says that the resurrection of Christ bears revelatory meaning and content—meaning and content that can be legitimately experienced by the believer. In this passage, the focus is not on the person of Christ as much as it is on what Haight believes are human attempts at describing the kind of experience of God people have had through the person of Christ. The resurrection of Christ does not function in Haight’s thought as a vehicle to convey empirically-inferred information about Christ to believers. Nevertheless, it does seem to function as a vehicle to convey some sort of real, tangible experience of God that is qualitatively different from the experiences which human beings normally have in their everyday lives.

Further, Molnar’s interpretation of the above passage leads him to narrowly read Haight and overlook other aspects that he posits about Christ’s resurrection. If taken seriously, these other aspects would militate against Molnar’s thesis that Haight simply denies that Christ rose from the dead. When addressing the disciples’ experiences of faith in Christ, Molnar insists that Haight breezily claims that “it is not the case that the affirmation ‘Jesus is risen’ could only be true if Jesus were ‘physically’ encountered or the tomb were really empty.” Molnar’s explanation, that Haight simply denies the historical character of Christ’s resurrection as the origin of the disciples’ faith, is what permits him to overlook the full context of what Haight has to say about his interpretation of Christ’s resurrection. The context of Molnar’s quotation of Haight, with the part Molnar quotes being italicized, is provided:

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To round off the elements of this theoretical reconstruction of how faith in the resurrection of Jesus first came about, I simply recall the point already made: the stories of appearances and the empty tomb are ways of expressing and teaching the content of a faith already formed. Most exegetes agree on this. On the one hand, then, most of the theories which strive to maintain that the appearance narratives have empirical, historical referents do so by various forms of deliberate ambiguity in the meaning of historical reference: such phrases as the disciples ‘somehow encountered,’ or the narratives describe ‘some historical event,’ explain little. On the other hand, those who insist on the naïve realism of the appearance stories may be falling into the trap of those who deny Jesus was personally risen. Meaning is not totally determined by immediate reference; it is not the case that the affirmation ‘Jesus is risen’ could only be true if Jesus were ‘physically’ encountered or the tomb were really empty. The fact that some realities can only be known metaphorically or symbolically need not be a philosophical or theological embarrassment. It is a mark of their transcendence. The appearance stories are very clear and positive statements that Jesus is risen, and there is no reason to believe that their authors intended them to be anything less than such positive symbols. There is a middle ground between fundamentalism and a purely existential interpretation of the resurrection. A critical theology, which subjects these symbols to the reflection to which they give rise, should have no problem with the symbolic character of the New Testament witness to the resurrection.62

The context given above indicates that Molnar and Haight have two very distinct and separate concerns when it comes to evaluating the historicity of Christ’s resurrection. Molnar obviously wants to take it seriously and he accepts as a presupposition of faith Christ’s bodily resurrection from death as an actual event that happened to him, independent of any faith experiences of him which others may have had.63 For Molnar, it is not the faith of the disciples that establishes Christ’s resurrection, but rather it is Christ’s resurrection as a literal event in the life of the historical figure Jesus Christ that establishes the disciples’ Easter faith.64 In his own way, Haight also wants to take the resurrection of Christ seriously. The focus of Haight’s attention in the above quotation, however, is not on the historicity of the resurrection and the empty tomb but on

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62 Haight, Jesus, 145-146.

63 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 234.

64 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235-236.
what he considers to be the reality of God. For Haight, the statement that “Jesus is risen” does not create the resurrection event; rather, this proclamation is human recognition that God has revealed himself through Christ, with his resurrection serving as a symbolic demonstration that Jesus and God are linked. In Haight’s view of Christ’s resurrection, the disciples’ faith only serves as evidence that they already believed in Christ and/or his resurrection before Easter—not after this event occurred.

Haight’s concern in the above quotation is quite clear: establishing the basis or ground upon which belief in Christ’s resurrection can rest. Because he bases the epistemological surety of Christ’s resurrection in the human experience of God as mediated through Christ himself, Haight feels no need to rely on appearance narratives and a verifiably empty tomb as proofs or rationale for believing that Christ rose from the dead. Haight makes two points that are well worth remembering, but which Molnar did not include in his analysis of Haight’s doctrine of Christ’s resurrection. First, there is a great deal of ambiguity contained in many arguments that seek to prove the historicity of Christ’s resurrection—the quintessential “something happened” approach—and this doesn’t actually provide us with definitive information about his resurrection; ultimately, mystery is still appealed to, or at least utilized to some degree. Second, the meaning or reality of the resurrection of Christ is not determined solely by historical facts or temporal events. The person and meaning of Christ as a revelation of God also determine the way in which we understand the how’s and what’s of Christ’s resurrection. These points are legitimate and help remind orthodox Christians that the determining factor of belief in Christ’s resurrection is not an empty tomb that can be pointed to, as if our faith was in an empty tomb, but is the person of Jesus Christ himself. While Molnar points out that Haight undermines the position that Christ’s resurrection is an event in human history that actually happened to Christ, he has neither demonstrated how this makes Haight a Nestorian nor has he even mentioned Nestorianism in this portion of his analysis of Haight.

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2.4 Haight: Same Jesus in His Life and Resurrection

Molnar’s deficiency of misinterpretation also holds true for his understanding of Haight’s concept of symbol. In quoting Haight, Molnar locates Haight’s position on the rise of belief in Christ’s resurrection in the premeditated creative activity of the disciples after the crucifixion: “One cannot know concretely how the disciples experienced Jesus as risen…The stories of the apparitions…are not reports of the events as they happened…They were created afterwards as expressions of faith.”66 For the most part, Molnar has accurately represented Haight’s views regarding what he feels is ambiguity in articulating exactly how the disciples experienced a resurrected Christ. What Molnar ignores, however, is what Haight says a little later regarding the nature of the post-Easter experiences of Christ which his disciples had. Haight gives this explanation:

Some exegetes and theologians believe that they can find sufficient grounds in the historical Jesus to warrant a belief in his resurrection…Other theologians explicitly reject the view that Jesus during his lifetime supplied the grounds for belief in his own resurrection….I suggest a position between these two that combines the insights of both. It seems clear that one cannot infer objectively a potential knowledge of Jesus’ resurrection from a critical reading of the New Testament record of his teaching during his lifetime. But although the historical Jesus of Nazareth is not the sufficient ground for an affirmation of his resurrection, he is its necessary ground. One cannot affirm a resurrection of Jesus without reference to Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover, one must account in some way for the resurrection of Jesus. The one affirmed to be risen was Jesus, and such an affirmation necessarily presupposes a memory of him. Further, there must have been something about Jesus that impelled a hope in his resurrection. Jesus is thus the external historical cause that gave rise to the faith-hope in his resurrection, but he is not the sufficient or adequate cause.67

Haight’s mediating position, while questionable as a valid interpretation of the grounds for belief in Christ’s resurrection, nonetheless demonstrates a consistency in his evaluation of the person of Christ. The Jesus of history, whom the disciples experienced and

66 Haight, Jesus, 136, quoted in Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 235.
67 Haight, Jesus, 142; italics original.
remembered, is identified by Haight as the same Jesus who is proclaimed by these disciples to be risen from the dead. Though Haight identifies the resurrection as a symbolic representation of Christ’s connection to God/transcendence, it is evident by his repeated references to Jesus that Haight is talking about the human being Jesus of Nazareth, who has risen from the dead and is now alive with God. Haight’s references to Christ as the basis for belief in his resurrection are not robust, and Molnar rightly recognizes and points this out. Nevertheless, Haight does make some reference to Christ as the ground for the disciples’ belief in his resurrection. Similarly, Haight does not indicate in the above explanatory quotation that the exalted Jesus through whom the disciples experience God is a different Jesus or has undergone a change from the Jesus they interacted with during his life and ministry. Any language of division in the person of Christ, especially in terms of distinguishing between his divinity and humanity, is absent from Haight’s own treatment of Christ’s resurrection, as well as Molnar’s analysis of this aspect of Haight’s thought.

2.5 Haight: Christ Himself Determines the Meaning of His Resurrection

As Molnar represents him, Haight is seen as simply claiming that Jesus does not matter; instead, only the ways in which we determine his meaning for us matter: “In the end he actually believes that Christian faith would be the same even if there ‘had been no explicit experience of resurrection.’ This is because ‘Jesus’ life, what he said and did, is the center of faith. Jesus’ ministry and message mediate a revelation of God.’” But as the context of Haight’s words will once again show, this is a misrepresentation of his thought. Again, Molnar’s quotation of Haight is in italics:

But it [Hans Kung’s claim that the center of Christian faith is solely Christ’s resurrection] makes it appear as though the person of Jesus, seen in his earthly teaching and actions as a whole, was not and is not in himself a revelation of God, or not a revelation of God sufficient enough not to require another external divine initiative…Therefore the resurrection, as a distinct and discrete event in response to the cross, is taken as the center of faith, and is that upon which the whole of Christian faith rests. And, given this conviction about the finality of the

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resurrection, nothing else matters. The focus of faith becomes Jesus now, risen and present to us as a revelation of our future. Given that relationship to Jesus risen, the memory of his life pales into relative insignificance.

Jesus’ message is true, and his life a revelation of God, even if, contrary to fact, there had been no explicit experience of resurrection. Jesus’ life, what he said and did, is the center of faith. Jesus’ ministry and message mediate a revelation of God. Its content is the love and fidelity of God. In remembering Jesus, his message and life, and by the gracious initiative of God as Spirit in their lives, the disciples came to realize that Jesus is an authentic revelation of God. Moreover, they came to recognize that Jesus now lives with God partly through Jesus’ own representation of God during his public ministry. Thus one may speak of the resurrection as God’s confirming and validating Jesus’ life, but not as an event independent of or isolated from Jesus’ life. Resurrection is a part of Jesus’ life as its transcendent end.  

Perhaps it is in this passage that Haight shows us in the clearest sense what the center of his thinking about Christ’s resurrection is: Christ himself. It is difficult to see how Haight could believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. His use of the phrase “contrary to fact” is intriguing because it suggests that he does indeed believe Christ rose bodily from the dead. Given all the negative statements he has made about a bodily resurrection, however, it is uncertain how much weight Haight would ultimately want to give to this minor expression. Despite this, there is no indication that Haight’s difficulty in affirming the historicity of Christ’s resurrection is dependent on Nestorianism. As the context of the above quotation demonstrates, Haight is very adamant about keeping the whole person of Christ together in his Christology. The exact nature of Christ’s connection to God, especially as a crucified human being who died and may or may not have actually risen from the dead, is still in question because Haight has not clarified this matter. What is fairly clear is that Haight thinks it is an error to separate those two realities—the human and the divine—from an interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth. Further, Haight stresses that the interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth necessarily entails his whole person, inclusive of his death as well as his life, teachings, ministry, and resurrection.

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70 Haight, Jesus, 149-150.
Haight is ambiguous regarding the way in which Jesus is a revelation of God and the way in which he lives after the crucifixion. One of the few elements that is not ambiguous in Haight’s discussion of Christ’s resurrection, however, is the focus he places on the person of Christ as the human communicator of God, who is also taken up (symbolically) into the reality of God through “resurrection” (whatever that ultimately means for Haight). The Jesus whom Haight has been describing is not synthetic. In all the quotations used by Molnar, which have been examined in light of their context in Haight’s work, none of them have utilized language that would suggest that Haight’s Christ is an entity divisible into constituent parts of deity and humanity. Likewise, the Jesus whom Haight describes is not a part-human, part-divine Jesus, nor is the revelatory Jesus separated from the human Jesus; rather, the Jesus whom Haight describes is an entire and whole Jesus of Nazareth who was and somehow continues to be a revelation of God and a participant in God by means of his life, death, and “resurrection.”

**Conclusion**

Molnar’s numerous qualms with the way Haight seems to erode the factuality and historicity of the resurrection of Christ are well articulated and welcome. His defense of Christ’s resurrection notwithstanding, Haight’s juxtaposition of how Christ’s resurrection functions as a symbolic reference to his relation to God with the apparent skepticism he uses to assess the disciples’ resurrection accounts in the New Testament inevitably casts dispersion on the reliability of New Testament experiences of God and Christ. Further, the way in which Haight discusses the nature of Christ’s resurrection ultimately creates a dichotomy between the experience of Jesus that the disciples had and the experiences of Jesus which subsequent Christians have had. These are formidable theological issues in Haight’s understanding of Christ’s resurrection, and Molnar was right to profusely point them out in *Incarnation and Resurrection*. But I cannot see how the source of these theological issues can be ascribed to Nestorianism in Haight’s thinking.

It is possible that Molnar intended to show how Nestorianism could partly account for the dichotomy between our experiences of Jesus and the disciples’ experiences of Jesus. Perhaps the point that Molnar attempted to make was that one could only come away with an experience of God through Christ such as Haight described if he or she separated Christ’s
deity from his humanity, and consequently used Jesus merely as an instrument by which to contact and communicate with God. Alternatively, maybe Molnar believed that he had detected the presence of Nestorianism in Haight’s attempt to state how Jesus is connected to us and how Jesus is simultaneously connected to God. The reality of either of these possibilities, however, is that we don’t know what point Molnar was trying to make about Haight and Nestorianism because Molnar himself never makes it. He asserts that Haight is a Nestorian in his articulation of Christ’s resurrection, but Molnar neither states up front that this is his conviction nor sufficiently or clearly demonstrates this assertion when analyzing Haight’s comments about the resurrection of Christ.

The lack of any direct or indirect references to a division between the deity and humanity of the person of Christ on the part of Haight necessarily calls into question the adequacy of Molnar’s interpretation of Christ’s resurrection in Haight’s Christology. That there are problems in what Haight believes about the resurrection of Christ is fairly clear, both from Molnar’s assessment of Haight and from reading the context of Haight’s own words; that these problems are due, in whole or in part, to the heretical presence of Nestorianism is dubious. Given the ways in which Molnar has inadequately handled the nuances and subtleties of Haight’s thought on Christ’s resurrection, his treatment of Haight as heretical looks far more like personal invective than is does objective diagnosis of Christological error.

The categories of heresy and orthodoxy are appropriate when evaluating coherence with or departure from the theological pronouncements of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Nicaea and Chalcedon set the standard for Christology, not only in the sense of being the formative statements on the person of Christ but also by establishing the parameters within which we may continually reflect on the person of Christ. Haight recognized this and claimed to work within these parameters, so Molnar’s use of such categories is not incongruous to an accurate assessment of Haight’s theology. The problem with Molnar’s assessment, however, is that he charged to Haight’s account a heresy of which he does not appear guilty. Haight’s language about the resurrection of Christ lends itself more to a conclusion that Haight doesn’t believe that Jesus is actually God, and less to a belief that Haight separates Christ’s divinity from his humanity. Whatever Christological heresies Haight might be guilty of, it is fairly evident that Nestorianism is not one of them.
WITTGENSTEIN’S MYSTICISM AND ‘LANGUAGE GAMES’: IMPLICATIONS FOR A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Derek Nutt

Abstract: Wittgenstein’s critique of language and meaning has had no small effect on the contemporary theological landscape. This study considers, in regards to the issue of meaning in religious discourse, two epochs of his thought in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and Philosophical Investigations. The restraint Wittgenstein places on philosophical reflection in religion and the use of religious language occasions an individualistic mysticism, obviating the need for a theology of religions. Since this task of theology, it may be argued, is vital as a framework for undertaking ecclesiologically motivated mission and cross-cultural evangelism, Wittgenstein’s critique seems to be anathema to Christianity’s traditional response to the ‘Great Commission.’

Keywords: Cognitivism, Language games, Mysticism, Religious Language

Introduction

Few adherents of a world religion would consider that their discourse on the divine and the extramundane world might be nonsensical. The multifarious phenomena that characterize the religious experience and practice of billions worldwide—rituals, incantations, hymns, sacred writings, doctrines, confessions, vows, prayers, sermons, etc.—are all predicated upon the premise of the believer that the linguistic expressions accompanying these practices refer, at least analogically, to the supersensible entity which they intend to signify. In other words, they confidently believe, whether consciously or unconsciously, that their religious language corresponds to what is true and refers to what is real. This notion of meaning in religious language, termed realism in the discipline of philosophy of religion, was the dominant stream among Christian intelligentsia for centuries. Even a perfunctory observation of the
religious practices of many in contemporary times indicates that it is still the norm for the average religious believer.¹

Though he eschewed theories, Wittgenstein’s seminal contributions in criticizing language and meaning are widely thought to have opened the way for a “non-realist” view of religious language.² Non-realists hold that religious language does not refer to reality. This is in contrast to the realist view that religious language means something inasmuch as it refers to some transcendent object (e.g. God, final judgment). Thus, in non-realism religious assertions are without meaning except, as Wittgenstein would argue in his later work, said assertions are understood as part of a particular ‘form of life’ and are found to be logically coherent within a particular ‘language game’. In this paper, I address Wittgenstein’s mysticism and his discussion of ‘language games’ and consider their implications for a biblically-responsible theology of religions. By theology of religions I intend a (Christian) theological understanding of the world’s religious landscape in regards to the exclusive claims³ of Christianity-traditionally-conceived that the biblical Christ is the source of true knowledge and salvation (Acts 4:12, Jn. 14:6, Col. 2:3).⁴ I consider this in the light of the Christian concept of

¹ Most notably, Aquinas articulated the dominant view that predications of God should be understood as analogical to the same predications made of people (e.g. God is good; Peter is good) By contrast, John Duns Scotus held that the same set of predications may be univocally understood. Finally, those such as Pseudo-Dionysius who have emphasized the ineffability of God have held that all propositions of God can only be understood as equivocal—having a completely different meaning. However, an equivocal understanding of religious assertions by believers in these cases has often led to an apophatic approach where language about God, though it can only be stated negatively as ‘what God is not’, still refers to supersensible reality. All of these would align with a realist understanding of religious language since they all assume that religious language refers, however literally, to reality.


³ I do not intend here that Christianity is by definition “exclusivist” in the strict sense of the use of the term in the philosophy of religion, but that Christian tradition has most commonly interpreted the Scriptures as revealing some exclusive claims about Christ as the only source of true knowledge and salvation, even though these exclusive claims may be understood in a nuanced, inclusivist manner.

⁴ I will use the phrase ‘Christianity-traditionally-conceived’ throughout as a ‘catch-all’ for Christian theologies and belief-systems that are grounded in divine revelation, especially Scripture, and derive their content from Scripture as normative, most notably the
revelation and also determine the place of evangelism and global mission within the demesne of Wittgenstein’s critique. I also consider multiple interpretations of Wittgenstein and how a proposed cognitivist interpretation of his work, however valid, does open the door to personal salvation for a non-Christian practicing an implicit faith.

Wittgenstein on Language and the Mystical in the ‘Tractatus’

Wittgenstein’s two most definitive works, *Tractatus-logico-philosophicus* (1921) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) have had an immense impact on many fields of study and are the most instructive for gaining a clear picture of his thought. I will not here delve into the issue of how many phases of thought Wittgenstein’s project consists of as this is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of his philosophy. Nevertheless, these two works do most adequately elucidate a mode of thought that is a serious challenge to Christianity-traditionally-conceived. Although there are marked differences between the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* in terms of Wittgenstein’s views on language, the two works are consistent in at least two salient themes: first, a severely limited function for philosophy in conjunction with similarly austere limitations on language usage, and second, an overt mysticism.

Wittgenstein adumbrates his disposition towards religion and belief in the *Tractatus* in the preface when he says that “The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly; and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.” Here, one can already descry a Kantian regard for reason and rational doctrines considered mysterious and yet most definitive (e.g. the Trinity, Incarnation).

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language before reaching the main body of the text. In the initial aphorisms, Wittgenstein writes that “the world is all that is the case” and the “sum total of reality.” When Wittgenstein speaks of reality here, he is not denying that there is something else besides ‘the world,’ but as we will see, the ‘something else’ occupies an esoteric, ineffable place in the order of things and is not an object of knowledge for philosophy. 

In his early work, Wittgenstein thought that whatever one can say that makes sense can be said with logical precision and, thus, it may be said to be true. Propositions consist of names, the concretion of which makes a “state of affairs.” These form a picture (in the sense of a model) in the mind of the individual that may, if true, correspond to reality. The criterion for what may be considered a true proposition does not rest with the task of philosophy, however, but with the task of the natural sciences. They are concerned with what is empirical and deniable, and so, because clarity and precision are available, propositions of natural science make up what amounts to, for Wittgenstein, the ideal language.

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8 New World Encyclopedia contributors, "Ludwig Wittgenstein," New World Encyclopedia, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Ludwig_Wittgenstein&oldid=971986. The authors write: “There is much talk in the Investigations, then, of “idle wheels” and language being “on holiday” or a mere "ornament," all of which are used to express the idea of what is lacking in philosophical contexts. To resolve the problems encountered there, Wittgenstein argues that philosophers must leave the frictionless ice and return to the ‘rough ground’ of ordinary language in use; that is, philosophers must ‘bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.’ In this regard, Wittgenstein may be perceived as a successor to Kant, whose Critique of Pure Reason argues in a similar manner that when concepts are applied outside of the range of possible experience, they result in contradictions. The second part of Kant's Critique consists of refutation, typically by reductio ad absurdum or contradiction, of such matters as logical proofs of the existence of god, the existence of souls, infinity and necessity. Wittgenstein's objections to the use of language in inappropriate contexts mirrors Kant's objections to the non-empirical use of reason.”

9 Wittgenstein, Tractatus, 1.1, 2.063.

10 Wittgenstein, Tractatus, 4.01, 4.031.

11 Wittgenstein, Tractatus, 2.1, 2.12, 2.222, 2.223, 4.01. As Edward Cell writes, “the position of the early Wittgenstein, in effect, rules out the possibility of religious language by making the logic of natural science normative for all language.” Cell, Language, Existence & God, 140.
For our purposes here, what Wittgenstein’s rigorous critique of language in the *Tractatus* has achieved is the removal from the world of all verbal, meaningful communication in the areas of aesthetics, ethics, and religion. These subjects are beyond the boundaries of language. In the case of religion, Wittgenstein not only sees religious assertions as pushing against the boundaries of language, but he takes the metaphysical stance that “God does not reveal himself in the world.” These together, the limitations of language and an apparent denial of revelation, necessitate that all metaphysical assertions about God and a supernatural order are nonsensical. We cannot even conceive a meaningful sentence about them, and so we are left to speak only of the empirical world.  

It is very important to recognize that Wittgenstein is *doing philosophy* when he makes these statements in the *Tractatus*, and that for him, philosophy has strict limitations. Precluded from philosophy are propositions about what is beyond the world, and even about what is essential in the world. The essence of the world “must lie” outside of the world. Philosophy is not a “body of doctrine.” It is an activity committed to the clarification of ideas and critique of propositions purporting to be truth. As a result, the correct method in philosophy is to say nothing except what can legitimately be said.

The reader of the *Tractatus* soon apprehends the (arguably comical) irony that Wittgenstein, ever the opponent of theory where he deems it unfit, is himself making a number of complex, theoretical assertions about the world and metaphysics in the name of philosophy. However, he is not only aware of this predicament, he has prepared this contradictory arrangement. The main body of the *Tractatus* following the preface and preceding the conclusion is designed as a penultimate, heuristic device to draw his reader to what he considers a higher way of thinking. He writes accordingly at the conclusion:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak,

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throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.\footnote{Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus}, 6.54.}

Clearly, Wittgenstein has devised philosophical propositions (‘the ladder’) and at least a semblance of a metaphysical theory in the \textit{Tractatus} that he regards as nonsensical and beyond what is permissible for philosophy. He apparently views that as necessary to achieve his purpose of helping the reader to realize (‘to see the world aright’) that what is most important is what lies beyond the world, and, that philosophy does not have the answer to humankind’s deepest questions. Here, we can see in an indirect but nevertheless bold stroke Wittgenstein’s fervent, non-cognitive mysticism. In private communication with his publisher Wittgenstein confirmed that it was what was not said in the \textit{Tractatus, but what was unsaid} that is most important:

> My work consists of two parts, the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important point. For the ethical gets its limit drawn from the inside, as it were, by my book…I’ve managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it …For now I would recommend you to read the preface and the conclusion, because they contain the most direct expression of the point.\footnote{Anat Biletzki & Anat Matar. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Ludwig Wittgenstein," http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein. Note: By the ethical in this quote, Wittgenstein is referring to all beyond the realm of language. The authors add that “It is the importance given to the ineffable that can be viewed as an ethical position.”}

What Wittgenstein means by putting “everything firmly into place” is that he has set off the unsayable from what can be expressed, and in so doing, he has given the sacred its elevated due. He calls this the “mystical” in the \textit{Tractatus}. The ‘mystical’ are those ‘things’ ineffable that cannot be pictured by human language but “make themselves manifest.”\footnote{Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus}, 6.522.}
Wittgenstein’s Language and Meaning Revolution

The non-cognitive mysticism in regards to the religious and ethical that we find in the Tractatus is not lost in the Philosophical Investigations. What does change in a singular way is Wittgenstein’s understanding of how language works. Whereas in the Tractatus language has an objective, stable structure that may provide one with a picture of reality, in the Investigations language and meaning are social constructs occurring in the flux and diversity of cultures and situations. Wittgenstein still “regards religion as non-scientific” but religious expressions are no longer necessarily meaningless.

The paradigmatic shift in principle that changed Wittgenstein’s perspective on language was his finding that the meaning of a word does not come from the object referred to. Instead, the meaning of a word comes from its use in everyday life. People participate in various forms of life (e.g. shopping, building a house, attending church). In each particular form of life, participants unconsciously agree in the flow of daily life upon rules as to how words are to function in that form of life. The language and the actions which are “woven” into a particular form of life

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17 To be fair to Wittgenstein and his desire not to promote a theory, Hilberg’s clarification on Wittgenstein’s non-cognitivism is helpful, as he suggests that instead of two categories of non-realism and realism, what is needed is a third which serves to distinguish Wittgenstein from those who theorize that language refers to reality and those who theorize that it doesn’t. He writes: “I am not suggesting that Wittgenstein promotes non-cognitivism. Rather, what I am saying is that a non-cognitivist interpretation of religion is an inescapable result of Wittgenstein’s quietism, his shunning of realism, anti-realism, or any philosophical theories.” Nathan Hilberg, “Religious Truth and Religious Diversity” (PhD Diss, University of Pittsburgh, 2006): 147; 116.

18 Cell, Language, Existence & God, 142-142.


20 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, The Collected Words of Ludwig Wittgenstein (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), (10) 6. Note: In all references to the Investigations, the number in parentheses refers to the number of the proposition in the text, while the second number indicates the page number in this particular edition.
are what Wittgenstein calls a “language game”. Words and propositions have meaning and are true or false only within a particular language game.\textsuperscript{21}

The definition of a ‘language game’ is not quite so simple, however. It is a slippery task of approximation at best. There are innumerable kinds of symbols (words, sentences) that can be constructed in human experience, and these are not fixed. Language games both come into existence and pass away depending on the situation, just as participants in a ballgame may arbitrarily change the rules of a game while playing.\textsuperscript{22} This gives meaning in verbal communication a highly volatile and often situational character. Wittgenstein also compares the varied nature of language games to the many types of games people play, such as card games, board games, ball games, and Olympic games. If we observe these games, we find that they share certain characteristics. Yet, they are also noticeably different in many ways. The same is true with ‘language games.’ They have no strict identity, but enough of a “family resemblance” that they are able to guide our way of understanding how language functions and meaning is identified in human life. What all games do share in common is a set of agreed upon rules that make the playing of the game—and meaning and truth—possible.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Implications of Wittgenstein’s Language Games for a Theology of Religions}

It is not difficult to see the impact Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘language games’ could have on how human beings determine what is true and what is real. If the meaning of a word or a proposition \textit{must} be determined by its use in a particular language game and not from an objective entity to which it points, then there are no propositions which can be deemed universally true or false. In the same vein, if ‘language games’ are a true account of how language and meaning work together, then human

\textsuperscript{21} Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, (7) 5. Wittgenstein does say elsewhere in this work that meaning comes from use “in most cases” (43) 20.

\textsuperscript{22} Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, (83) 39.

\textsuperscript{23} Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, (66) 32.
propositions and language cannot refer to reality. This is a non-realist view of human language.  

On the other hand, unlike the _Tractatus_, where Wittgenstein bracketed out meaningful expression of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious entirely, in his later work he admits them back into human life as a social, cognitive experience. What before was completely inexpressible, now can be said in the appropriate circumstance. That is to say, it is meaningful as long as it is understood by others (follows the rules) of the same language game, and, it is true as long as it is coherent with the other religious beliefs agreed upon by the participants of the language game.

Wittgenstein’s ‘language games’ is problematic for a religious tradition such as Christianity whose teachings promote some arguable measure of religious exclusivism (cf. Jn. 14:6, Acts 4:12, Col. 2:3). Along with his non-cognitive mysticism, they require the rejection of language as a “vehicle of revealed truth.” This means not only that revelation is limited to a non-cognitive experience, but the obvious corollary that there can be no textual authority for human religion. Within this worldview where God is unknowable and ineffable, the many expressions of human religion that have ever been, including their belief systems, rituals, and ethical practice, can only be seen as an equally valid, culturally-conditioned response to the mystical, or God. There is no error involved in these forms of religious expression, as Edward Cell remarks, “One who does not share another's religious beliefs may very often be said not to contradict them but simply not to look at things that way at all—not to have any sense of himself in terms of that form of life.”

24 See footnote 2.


27 Cell, _Language, Existence & God_, 196.
We find his position most clearly spelled out by Wittgenstein himself in his *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. Sir James Fraser's *Golden Bough* (1915), a comprehensive historical study on what Fraser called ‘primitive’ religions, was misguided to Wittgenstein. Fraser supposed that the ‘magical’ and ‘superstitious’ in traditional folk religions were errors. Of this Wittgenstein reflected:

Was Augustine in error, then, when he called upon God on every page of the Confessions? But—one might say—if he was not in error, surely the Buddhist holy man was—or anyone else—whose religion gives expression to completely different views. But none of them was in error, except when he set forth a theory.28

Here Wittgenstein juxtaposes the religious experience of Augustine to a Buddhist monk. Both believe in something outside of the world that is meaningful, and, as any religious person might, they orient themselves towards this higher reality. For Wittgenstein, it is wrong-headed for an individual—historically situated and lacking *sub specie aeternitatis* knowledge—to surmise that Augustine was right and the Buddhist monk is wrong, or vice versa. Each speaks according to the particular language game which they have learned in their time, place, and culture. There is no way for any individual to know with any certainty whether their utterances correspond to the extramundane reality of the mystical. Therefore, they cannot be compared according to their respective measure of truth and error, and it is not the case that one or the other is in error, but rather, that the two interpret the mystical and the empirical world in different ways. It seems clear that Wittgenstein’s language games necessitate here a “radical relativism” which, applied to the question of which religion is correct (or more correct), entails religious pluralism.29

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It is not altogether clear, however, that Wittgenstein is a relativist. Nathan Hilber claims that since Wittgenstein promotes no theory he cannot properly be labeled a relativist. The problem of relativism surfaces when readers of Wittgenstein try to construct a theory from his therapeutic critique.\(^\text{30}\) Hans Sluga argues that while Wittgenstein held that a belief is true or false based solely on its coherence within a belief system, in all of this Wittgenstein “was not advocating a relativism, but a naturalism [Sluga’s emphasis] that assumes that the world ultimately determines which language games can be played.”\(^\text{31}\)

This is a fascinating claim by Sluga for a number of related reasons. First, it is the often-negative connotation that attends the term ‘naturalism’ in Christian theology. It is true, as we have seen in the *Tractatus*, that Wittgenstein advocates a philosophic naturalism (‘the world is all that is the case’), and this is retained in his later work. However, his is not an atheistic naturalism. In his placing the highest logical and linguistic value on scientific propositions one might think this to be the case. But Wittgenstein also sees that scientific thinking cannot answer the most important questions of life and that this “urge(s)” us to the ‘mystical.’\(^\text{32}\)

In the end, Wittgenstein is not advocating that there is no objective truth, no single, ultimate truth, or one unified reality: *be is not purposefully advocating anything in the name of philosophy* except that reality and truth cannot be known with scientific accuracy by a historically situated observer. Sluga and Hilber may have a compelling case that Wittgenstein’s is not a strict relativism due to the rigid limitations he places on theory in philosophy and religion. But it seems indisputable, in considering Christianity ‘on-the-

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\(^{30}\) Hilberg claims that it is incorrect to label Wittgenstein as a relativist since he does not promote a theory. The argument seems to run that a theory would be a hypothetical statement about the nature of reality and since Wittgenstein intends to make no theory or statement about reality in his philosophy (whether he succeeds is questionable) he cannot be called a relativist. Hilberg notes that some who appropriate Wittgenstein, such as D.Z. Phillips, lapse into relativism using his principles. (Hilberg, “Religious Truth and Religious Diversity,” 155)


ground’ in the context of cross-cultural evangelism and missions where verbal communication, language, and shifting context (including an authoritative written text) are paramount, that if Wittgenstein’s criticism was put into practice it would entail no less than a functionally relativist worldview, and in this case, those aforementioned ecclesiological activities would lack a raison d’être.33

In Sluga’s denial of Wittgensteinian relativism quoted above we find the decisive factor that separates the later Wittgenstein’s mysticism and the language games that support it from Christianity-traditionally-conceived. Wittgenstein assumes that ‘the world decides which language games can be played’ while Christianity-traditionally-conceived accepts that God reveals himself. Thereby, I would like to suggest here that God inaugurates a decisive language game that withstands the diachronic vicissitudes of human linguistics.34 This latter point is integral because it is not as if the language of Christian revelation is static or terminology immune to alteration in meaning. Christianity traditionally conceived allows that a religious culture can at least contribute to the meaning of certain otherwise revealed religious concepts or propositions; as for example, when the church worked out its understandings of the divine and human natures of Christ, developing concepts like the communicatio idiomatum and the hypostatic union. Neither should Christianity traditionally conceived be dismissive of the value Wittgenstein’s ‘language games’ may have for its instructive insights into the complex translation issues that arises when communicating its revelation to sundry cultures, contexts, and religions. But Christianity traditionally conceived transcends the mystical ‘naturalism’ of Wittgenstein’s philosophical project by assuming that God


34 To clarify, obviously, the original terminology and phraseology of Scripture is not rigidly set, just as Scripture is not word-inspired, nor is it limited to one language in one epoch of time, not to mention that the original autographs are not extant. However, one could make the case, I would argue, that the concepts and narrative revealed to the inspired writers provide the boundaries of a distinctive ‘language-game’ holding eternal significance, even if the terms change because of linguistic and historical factors.
accommodates Himself to finite human beings and \textit{cognitively} reveals Himself in Scripture.\textsuperscript{35}

In Scripture, specific terms and names are used which help believers to define and identify religious concepts and figures. For example, an angel appears to Mary and instructs her to name her infant child ‘Jesus’ (perhaps \textit{Yeshua}, or something similar if the angel spoke in Aramaic, or \textit{Ιησοῦς} if the angel spoke in Greek). In this instance, Christianity-traditionally-conceived has held that a direct revelation has been given of a historical event in which a verbally pronounced name of the incarnate God has been revealed. Wittgenstein’s ‘language games’ would seem to necessitate that it would be non-sensical for someone to pray to (or about) Jesus with someone who does not share the same belief and participate in the same language game. This is because regardless of when or with whom such a prayer is uttered, the mention of the name ‘Jesus’ would not refer to any particular being or reality. By contrast, Christianity-traditionally-conceived holds that the language game for discourse of (or to) Jesus has been set by God himself through His own self-disclosure of a name referring to the reality. A Christian believer might add to this example another of the divine disclosure of the attributes of God to Moses when God passed before Him (Ex. 34:5-7) and numerous others instances where religious propositions, concepts, and names based on historical events and figures are believed by Christians to have been revealed in an epiphany and set down in writing by an inspired amanuensis.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} See for example, John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, 1.13.1. Also, Richard Muller, who writes: “The Reformers and their scholastic followers all recognized that God must in some way condescend or accommodate himself to human ways of knowing in order to reveal himself. This accommodatio occurs in the use of human words and concepts for the communication of the law and gospel, but it in no way implies the loss of truth or the lessening of scriptural authority.” \textit{Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 19.

\textsuperscript{36} Markus Locker echoes my claim here that at least parts of Scripture may be seen as having its own ‘language game’, albeit in a much more technical manner as a hermeneutical concept and not as a decisive language game that can overcome the vagaries of finite human language. To this end, he writes: “The concept of language-game in general, as well as its concrete characteristics and attributes, can be of substantial help in formulating new foundations of a biblical theology of the New Testament.” \textit{‘Jesus’ Language-Games: The Significance of the Notion of Language-Game for a Reformulation of New Testament Biblical Theology,} \textit{The Heythrop Journal}, 50.3, May 2009, 392-401.
The notion that Christianity has a divinely-initiated language game, so to speak, raises a familiar problem, however. Christianity rests on an exclusivist claim founded in Scripture that Jesus is the “only name under heaven” by which anyone can be saved, and the “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Acts 4:12, Jn. 14:6). Many Christians not only believe that the person of Jesus is the only avenue to salvation. They also assert that this knowledge is communicated as a verbal message consisting of his life and salvific work even while it is affirmed in a mystical manner by the internal testimony of the Spirit. These exclusivist beliefs, driven as they are in part by a textual authority and verbal communication, provokes the reflective and compassionate Christian believer to wonder, as Tite Tienou says: “what is the fate of those who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ?”

It is this question, notes Tienou, that requires a theology of religions. A theology of religions provides the “necessary [conceptual] framework” for Christian living, pastoral care, evangelism, and missions. By contrast, under the constraints of Wittgenstein’s mysticism and ‘language games’, there appears to be no basis for the individual Christian believer to share the message of the gospel with another, and concomitantly, the necessity of the existence of these functions of the visible church structure would be superfluous. If all religions are equally valid responses to the mystical, then there is no impetus for taking up what Christians call ‘The Great Commission’ (Matt. 28:19) to spread the news of Jesus Christ’s life and death. In short, mission and evangelism are superfluous, and Wittgenstein’s philosophical mysticism and ‘language games’ obviates the need for a ‘theology of religions.’ Hengstmengel’s perspective is illuminating on this latter point when he writes that for Wittgenstein


“theology does not make sense” even though it may function as grammar in a religious language game.\textsuperscript{40}

One may well wonder where Wittgenstein’s non-cognitive mysticism leaves him in terms of the religious capacity of the individual, other forms of revelation besides Scripture, and the competing truth-claims of the world’s religions. Christianity traditionally-conceived has also held that God has revealed himself through natural means by what is commonly called ‘general revelation’ (Rom. 1:20, Ps. 19:1). There is also an implicit sense in Scripture in which human beings, created in the divine image, were created with a consciousness of divinity, what Calvin calls a ‘seed of religion’ or sense of divinity (\textit{semen religionis; sensus divinitatus}).\textsuperscript{41} In briefly delving into this, it is helpful to consider the thought of J.H. Bavinck. Bavinck, elaborating upon Calvin’s notion of a ‘seed of religion,’ holds that humankind innately possesses a “religious consciousness,” which he further identifies as a “misty religious awareness” latent in each person even when doctrines and religious rituals are rejected.\textsuperscript{42} There are five phenomena of the religious consciousness that Bavinck thinks may be universally observed: the experience of totality, the notion of a norm, connection with a higher power, the need for deliverance, and the course of life as a tension between action and fate.\textsuperscript{43}

It is difficult, if not impossible, to say precisely how Wittgenstein would respond to each of these (except to admit he might not respond at all since such religious talk may not be allowed in his critique). On the surface, it seems his conflation of ethics with religion might disallow Bavinck’s view that an ethical norm (if it is a theory or proposition) is part of the natural, human religious consciousness. However, Wittgenstein’s

\textsuperscript{40} Hengstmengel, “’Philosophy to the Glory of God’. Wittgenstein on God, Religion and Theology.”

\textsuperscript{41} John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, Trans. by Harry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1.3.1; 1.4.1.


philosophical critique of language does not appear to rule out non-cognitive revelation via experience (‘the mystical shows itself’), and so it is plausible, if indeed these ‘magnetic points’ are non-cognitive, that for Wittgenstein the religiosity of the masses might be due, at least in part, to the other four of these phenomena. What is more evident, as we see from his thoughts on Fraser’s *Golden Bough*, is that Wittgenstein the philosopher would not follow Calvin in supposing that a ‘seed of religion’ left alone in the religious consciousness leads inevitably to idolatry.  

In his *General Revelation and the Non-Christian Religions*, Bavinck discusses the relationship of the world’s religions to the universal, general revelation. Bavinck explains that, as many Christian missionaries have discovered through their interactions with those of other religions, “elements of truth” can be found in these religions. Bavinck’s statement here suggests his own personal commitment to an understanding that religion *qua* religion is, in part, made up of doctrines and theories, and that genuine religious faith may legitimately seek rational understanding for support. Wittgenstein does not share these commitments. As we have seen from Wittgenstein’s quote above in response to Frazer, he holds there to be no truth or error in religion, except as it consists in a theory. Religion as composed of a theory, or theories, however, Wittgenstein makes it clear, is not what religion really is. Instead it is an intensely personal devotion/faith in the mystical, and this means that in religion *qua* religion, there are no mistakes in terms of knowledge.

It would seem then that Bavinck’s notion of ‘elements of truth’ would only be acceptable for Wittgenstein if one is comparatively assessing the


46 J. Kellenberger, “Wittgenstein and Truth in Incompatible Religious Traditions,” *Science Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 12, no. 2 (1983): 167-169. Kellenberger writes: “For Wittgenstein the reason that there are no mistakes in philosophy …is, at one level, the same reason that there are no mistakes in religion. Neither philosophy nor religion is a matter of making judgments and holding opinions. Neither is a matter of investigating, adopting, and defending a theory. For Wittgenstein, both are matters of holding, or being held by, a picture. And, for Wittgenstein, both go beyond the bounds of language.”
theories and doctrines of world religions from one’s own perspective and/or with others of the same language game (except for the fact that this would only be theorizing and would not represent an activity of religion qua religion.) However, which ‘elements of truth’ are correct objectively-speaking would depend on the individual’s perspective within the language game which they participate in. With numerous language games and historical situations to contend with in inter-religious dialogue, no objective consensus would exist, then, on the ‘truth’ between what is being compared, e.g. whether it is the Muslim doctrine, Christian, between Christian denominations, or otherwise, not to mention to what extent these elements are comparable. This task, once carried out, would leave the investigator(s) in precisely the position that the diverse religious believers already find themselves—in disagreement over whose religion is the truth, or most truthful.

An alternative interpretation of Wittgenstein comes from J. Kellenberger, who has argued that while there is this strong non-cognitivist appeal in Wittgenstein, there is also a “cognitivist strain.”47 Kellenberg explains that Wittgenstein does allow that one can have a false belief if one’s belief does not correspond to reality. Since one’s religious belief is based upon a “picture” engendered by the religious language and propositions one holds to, one is able to ask whether this picture is congruent to reality.48 Kellenberger explains:

[Wittgenstein’s] therapeutic construction of philosophy would allow that even though a philosopher who is misled by a picture has made no mistake (for he has made no mistake in judgment), still he has accepted in his life and thinking what is false. He holds no false view, but he is captivated by a picture which it is false to say applies to reality…This strand of Wittgenstein’s thought would remind us that some false beliefs are not mistakes, and that there being no mistake does not entail there being no false belief [emphasis supplied].

47 Kellenberger, “Wittgenstein and Truth in Incompatible Religious Traditions,” 170. Cf. Hilberg who argues that one cannot construe a “cognitivist” strain in the later Wittgenstein: “It is not the case that that Wittgenstein’s later thoughts on religion should be interpreted as taking a cognitive approach…” Hilberg, "Religious Truth and Religious Diversity,” 149.

For this cognitivist strain, even if there are no mistakes in religion it is possible to accept what is false in religion, as it is possible to accept what is true, and when one holds what is false, one is not right in the sense that what one accepts is not true. For this strain, the reason that neither St. Augustine nor the Buddhist saint is mistaken is that neither has come to his religion as a matter of judgment, but one or both may still have a false belief and not be right in the sense that his belief is not in accord with reality.  

Kellenberg’s statement can only be understood in the light of Wittgenstein’s definition of religion qua religion as personal faith that is measured in subjective terms, and is perhaps best explained by Kierkegaard in his Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Kierkegaard relates a parable of two religious believers, one a pagan idol worshipper, the other a Christian believer who lives in the midst of ‘Christendom’ (a pejorative term for Kierkegaard denoting superficial, bourgeois Christianity). The idol worshipper prays with ‘the entire passion of the infinite’ with his gaze on his idol. The ‘Christian’ prays with a truer theory of God, but with a false spirit. ‘Where is the most truth?’ Kierkegaard asks. Following Kellenberg’s interpretation of an alleged cognitivist strain from the Investigations, Wittgenstein (like Kierkegaard) would answer that in this case the most truth resides with the idol worshipper. This shows by extension, Kellenberg argues, that two believers with “incompatible conceptions” of God could both be right in their faith since both could have faith “in the same God” (assuming they are both sincere in their devotion.) But, as with Kierkegaard’s parable, in the case of the one who expresses a more authentic, ardent religious faith yet is cognitively unaware of the true object of worship, this is the one who is most aligned or connected with what is true.

This argument, whether it follows from a valid interpretation of Wittgenstein or not, raises an all-important question that a Christian theology of religions, with its exclusive claims of Christ as the ‘way,’ ‘the

49 Kellenberger, “Wittgenstein and Truth in Incompatible Religious Traditions,”

50 Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Ed. H.V. Hong (Princeton University Press), 201-203.

truth,’ and the ‘life’ must address; a compassionate and honest response is also important for Christianity to be consistent in its pillar teachings of divine justice, wisdom, and mercy. Is it possible that some adherents of, say Hinduism or Islam, have a connection with Christ and pray to the Christian God, unbeknownst to them? The intensity of the question is heightened when one reflects upon the many religious believers in recorded and unrecorded human history who have had no empirical access to the Christian Scriptures or the message of the Gospel. It seems that Wittgenstein, according to this proposed cognitivist strain, would affirm this possibility. And from this, perhaps Wittgenstein could legitimately claim that a Buddhist monk might be ‘right’, or authentic, in their belief in God, and, that through this implicit faith they could experience eternal salvation in the Christian sense.

**Conclusion**

In Wittgenstein’s early philosophy, language is logically precise and scientific, and since religion is associated with the ineffable and ‘mystical’, does not allow for meaningful religious discourse. This coheres with the non-realist view that religious language does not refer to reality. In his later work, Wittgenstein evolves to allow language a more varied and robust function in human life. In the case of religion, meaningful statements about religion are possible, but only within a particular form of life and among those who ascribe to the same ‘language game’.

For Christianity-traditionally-conceived, Wittgenstein’s ‘language games’ obviates the need to develop a theology of religions. Since meaning is entirely culturally conditioned and religious statements do not refer to reality, every religion is an equally valid response to the ‘mystical’, at least in terms of the truth of its doctrines. These two points preclude taking up the ‘Great Commission’ admonition to spread Christian doctrines via evangelism and mission. Christianity-traditionally-conceived instead holds

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52 Some doubt that a cognitivist strain can be found in Wittgenstein’s thought. As Nathan Hilberg states, Wittgenstein does not promote non-cognitivism, but his treatment of religion “amounts to non-cognitivism.” Hilberg, "Religious Truth and Religious Diversity,” 111; 115.

that God initiates a decisive ‘language game’ through the revelation of Scripture. The challenge of language and meaning in Christian evangelism and cross-cultural mission is undeniable, but Wittgenstein’s critique takes this challenge too far in what appears to be a non-cognitive mysticism. A cognitivist interpretation of Wittgenstein does raise the all-important issue of whether saving faith may be implicit in a non-Christian believer, an issue that must be seriously considered in any reputable theology of religions.
REIMAGING GIDEON’S LEADERSHIP IN LIGHT OF MAX WEBER’S SOCIOLOGY OF AUTHORITY

Isaias D’Oleo-Ochoa

Abstract: Despite the methodological usefulness of some recent scholarship, Max Weber’s sociology of authority may still prove fruitful for biblical and leadership studies. This paper explores Gideon’s judgeship from such a perspective in order to broaden our understanding of the Gideon narrative as depicted in Judges 6-8 and reclaim Gideon’s portrayal as a competent and strong leader in spite of his initial state of hesitation and faith struggle.

Keywords: Charisma, Charismatic Leadership, Faith Struggle, Sociology of Religion, Suspension of the Ethical

Introduction

Even though there have been studies that have analyzed the charismatic leadership in the Old Testament specifically during the 50’s and 60’s of the twentieth century, except for biblical surveys and recent scholarly publications, the topic has not received much further study and reflection. This is reflected, for example, in leadership studies focusing on the Book of Judges, both in a particular sense—analyzing the leadership development of a major or minor judge—or in a general sense—studying the era of pre-monarchy era in Israel from a leadership perspective. The

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3 See, e.g., Elie Assis, Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon,
rise of new methodologies in biblical studies, the challenges to Max Weber’s sociology of religion, and the focus on kingship in Ancient Israel seem to have contributed to this situation. Zeev Weisman, for instance, analyzed Weber’s contributions of charismatic authority in biblical studies and challenged some of the misunderstandings around the type of leadership during the era of the judges. Between 1932 and 1966 there were biblical scholars who, after studying the Weberian notion of charisma, supported the hypothesis that “the judges in Israel’s pre-monarchy era represented this kind of leadership.” The problem arose, among other aspects, regarding “a tendency…developed among some scholars to identify the charismatic leaders with the political system of the era [of the judges].” Weisman disagreed with that tendency and correctly asserted that “there is no real justification for the application of this term [charismatic leadership] to a political regime or to any consecutive historical system of leadership; it may properly be applied only to individual leaders as such.”

More recently there have been scholars, including Daniel I. Block and Susan E. Haddox, who despite not focusing on charismatic authority have indeed contributed to the leadership discussion in biblical studies. Both Block and Haddox have studied the figure of Gideon and his judgeship from different perspectives. Block studies the narrative of Judges 6-9 and offers a brief discussion on how the classical-critical, the contemporary-critical, the traditional pious, and the holistic literary approach have interpreted Gideon’s narrative in light of their own methodology. While the first three theories portray Gideon relatively in positive way, the holistic literary approach, however, has been more suspicious of such portrayal. “[I]t is difficult to accept the popular view of Gideon as a man

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*Abimelech, and Jephthah Narratives (Judges 6-12)* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

4 Weisman mentions Albretch Alt (1966), Martin Noth (1960), W.F. Albright (1942), Martin Buber (1932), and Yehetzel Kaufmann (1962) in “Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges,” 399.


of strong and pious devotion,” Block states. The importance of this essay is that it provides us different frameworks in which the Gideon narrative may be viewed and interpreted. Haddox instead analyzes Gideon’s character development through the lens of modern masculinity studies. According to her view, “Even after military success, the epithet ‘mighty warrior’ never rests comfortably with the reader’s experience of Gideon. Gideon frankly comes across as a wimp.” While this is a problematic conclusion, Maddox’s analysis, nonetheless, adds significant insight to the leadership discussion of the era of the judges.

Taking into account that far from being homogenous the judgeship of Gideon was under continuous development and social-cultural validation, and that the portrayal of Gideon as a heroic figure is disputed among modern scholars, I will be analyzing in the present paper Gideon’s leadership development inasmuch as he is a complex and “round character” in the biblical narrative. By using German sociologist Max Weber’s theory of charismatic authority, this article aims to explore the leadership of Gideon as depicted in Judges 6-8 in order to reclaim Gideon’s portrayal as a competent and strong leader in spite of his initial state of hesitation and faith struggle.


11 English novelist and literary critic Edward M. Foster coined the terms “flat” and “round” character. See E.M. Foster, Aspects of the Novel, (E. Arnold & Co.: London, 1927). In contrast to round characters, flat characters do not change much through a story because their psychological development is simple and easy to figure out. For example, in the Book of Exodus, Moses is portrayed as a round character in the narrative, while the Pharaoh is portrayed as a flat character.

I. Max Weber’s Concept of Charisma

Weber borrows the concept of charisma from German theologian Rudolf Sohm: “It is to his credit that Rudolf Sohm out the sociological peculiarity of this category of domination-structure for a historically important special case, namely, the historical development of the authority of the early Christian church.”13 Weber then develops further Sohm’s notion of charisma and affirms that “[t]he natural leaders in distress have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody.”14 That specific gift of the body and the spirit is what Weber calls “charisma.” Nevertheless, one needs to mention the following: First, the concept of charisma is used in a neutral sense since Weber does not consider there to be a difference between charisma for doing wrong and charisma for doing evil.15 Second, “charisma” in the Weberian sense should not be confused with the Pauline understanding of it in the New Testament. Rob Muthiah warns us about this possible confusion, and states:

Weber was conscious of the religious connection as he developed his idea of charisma. He knew he was drawing on Pauline language and he appropriated religious phrases to describe charisma. For example, he claimed that charisma “‘constitutes a call’ in the most emphatic sense of the word, a ‘mission’ or a ‘spiritual duty.’ Yet what Weber meant by charisma has almost no overlap with scriptural uses of charisma, just as the word mouse when applied to a little rodent has almost no overlap of meaning with the word mouse when applied to a piece of computer hardware.”16

Thus, the Weberian concept of charisma is related to authority vouchsafed to the leader, where such authority is validated and legitimized by the leader’s disciples and followers. Besides, Weber claims that charisma is

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based on “the authority of the extraordinary and personal gift of grace.”\textsuperscript{17} Otherwise, charisma is not based on the leader’s personal traits, but on the faith of the people in the leader and the dialectical relationship between him and his followers. It must be emphasized that when one speaks of the Weberian charisma, there is a close relation with distress and routine: the charismatic leader usually emerges in times of distress, and his charismatic structure is out of the daily routine.

II. How to Identify the Charismatic Leader?

Weber speaks of three types of dominion-structures: rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional. Charismatic leadership is the one that is more relevant in biblical studies because it is mainly associated with personal leadership and patriarchal structures in the Ancient Near Eastern societies. In his essay “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” Weber proposes a series of components that describes the charisma-holder. The first one has to do with charismatic qualification. Weber remarks, “[T]he ‘natural leaders’—in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, political distress—have been neither officeholders nor incumbents of an ‘occupation’….The natural leaders in distress have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit.”\textsuperscript{18} The disciples and followers of the charismatic leader must have faith in the unique divine calling of their leader, inasmuch as “the idea of God has already been clearly conceived, by virtue of the divine mission lying therein.”\textsuperscript{19} As a result, his disciples and followers, by virtue of his mission (and not because of his personal traits), validate the charismatic leader.

The second feature of the charisma-holder has to do with the lack of accountability or any agency of control. That is, the charismatic leader is not accountable to any regulating office or institution, except his “only inner determination and inner restraint.”\textsuperscript{20} This is so, for “[t]he holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience

\textsuperscript{17} Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in \textit{From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology}, 79.

\textsuperscript{18} Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 245.


and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them.”

Because of the calling of the charismatic leader is believed to be divine in the eyes of his followers, the charisma-holder does not need the people to grant him a ruling right. On the contrary, that right is derived, not from the people’s will, but from a divine source. In that respect, Weber explains, “[I]t is the duty of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.”

The third characteristic of the charisma-holder is his particularized dominion and leadership. This means that the mission of the charismatic leader is not universal, but delimited in several aspects, as Weber declares, “in meaning and in content the mission [of the charismatic leader] may be addressed to a group of men who are delimited locally, ethnically, socially, politically, occupationally, or in some other way.”

The fourth component that characterizes the charismatic leader is his rejection of economic motives. The charisma-holder rejects any undignified source of income from which he may benefit himself. Weber notes, “But charisma, and this is decisive, always rejects as undignified any pecuniary gain that is methodical and rational. In general, charisma rejects all rational economic conduit.” There are exceptions to this, however, such as the gain of a mission by warrior leaders.

The last but not least element of the charismatic leader is that he remains outside of the institutionalized routine. Weber states, “‘Pure’ charisma is contrary to all patriarchal domination…by its very nature it is not an ‘institutional’ and permanent structure, but rather, where its ‘pure’ type is at work, it is the very opposite of the institutionally permanent.”


The charisma-holder knows that his dominion is in virtue of his mission, and that his charisma is “specifically unstable.” 27 That is, charisma authority, by being mainly dynamic, is not a permanent dominion-structure inasmuch as “charisma does not know any ‘legitimacy’ other than that flowing from personal strength, that is, one which is constantly being proved.” 28 For that reason it is that Weber also writes, “Charismatic dominion means a rejection of all ties to any external order in favor of the exclusive glorification of the genuine mentality of the prophet or hero.” 29

### III. The Context and Content of Judges 6-8

The Book of Judges narrates the story of the judges—individuals who God chose to deliver Israel from their enemies in the pre-monarchy era. The people of Israel are portrayed as a community that is in the process of consolidation, where there is no king established. They are also portrayed as rebellious and idolatrous, doing always what was evil. The people of Israel experience the divine punishment, repent from their sins, and God saves them. In short, it is a common cycle with which every judge had to deal. Hence God rises up, calls, and prepares the judges in order that they could serve his purposes. This is also the case with Gideon son of Joash the Abiezrite, usually recognized as the fifth judge. Throughout chapters 6-8 of the Book of Judges, one comes to see the challenges that Gideon has and how he responds to them. The Gideon narrative begins with a brief context that is narrated in 6:1-10. The people of Israel have done evil again and have been under a frantic oppression of the Midianites for seven years. During this oppression, the people of Israel cry to the Lord and he sends a prophet who tells them the reasons of why they are suffering severely.

Regarding the content of Judges 6-8, the passage may be divided in the following sections: a) Judges 6:1-10, Brief context, b) Judges 6:11-24, Gideon’s calling and commissioning, c) Judges 6:25-32, Gideon is commanded to destroy his father’s altar, d) Judges 6:33-35, The Spirit comes over Gideon and he calls people to arms, e) Judges 6:36-40, Gideon

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IV. Reimaging Gideon’s Leadership and Authority

Before discussing Gideon’s leadership development, it should be noted that one of the main issues that arises when one analyses the leadership of the judges is that this is a complicated area in biblical studies. First, the judges are not kings, officials, representatives of any local authority, or elected by the people. On the contrary, they are common people whom God rises up out of their communities to carry out particular tasks, most of them to battle against ferocious enemies. Second, the corpus available from the biblical text is limited. And as if these limitations were not enough, one may add a third one: “the complicated literary criticism of these sources.”

The account of Gideon’s commissioning is narrated in 6:11-40. While Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress because of the fear of the Midianites, the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon, and greets him saying: “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!” (6:12). We essentially may interpret this greeting at least in two different ways: one that is descriptive, where the angel of the Lord describes Gideon’s past and current social status; and the second one that is annunciative, where the angel of the Lord gives a brief statement of Gideon’s calling to let him know that he has been chosen. This second option seems to fit better in Gideon’s story.

4.1 Gideon: A Flawed Hero?

One of the aspects we observe from the Gideon narrative is that God does not choose an established leader to carry out his purposes for delivering the people of Israel from the Midianites, but an anxious and fearful farmer. This opens the door, however, to find a diversity of

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31 All Scripture citations are taken from the New International Version.
interpretations when one, for instance, studies Gideon’s leadership development. Because of those interpretations, there is little agreement between scholars regarding the portrayal of Gideon as a leader. While, for some, Gideon is a courageous and strong biblical figure; for others, he is just a flawed hero, someone who has weakness in character. For example, J. Paul Tanner states, “Certainly Gideon was good news for Israel in that he affected the needed deliverance from Midian (and did act valiantly and nobly at several points in the story), but he struggled to believe God and was flawed in character.”32 In reply to that argument, I argue that Gideon is not a flawed leader despite his initial lack of self-assurance and faith struggle because, by virtue of his divine vocation, he progressively moves away from his state of hesitation and fear. In contrast to the flawed hero, Gideon’s reputation as a leader and warlord increases. Furthermore, leadership in Gideon’s cultural context is not measured by possessing a particular series of skills, such as assertiveness, for instance, but measured by the fulfillment of the leader’s mission, usually perceived as a divine task. And while developing his mission, the leader’s character nurtures and grows. This is confirmed by the fact that the people of Israel continuously offer their devotion to Gideon by recognizing not only his charisma but also his personal strength. Such devotion, Weber claims, means, “that the leader is personally recognized as the innerly ‘called’ leader of men. Men do not obey him by virtue of tradition or statue, but because they believe in him.”33

4.2 Gideon’s Collective Fear

Now the psychological state of Gideon may be also disputed. The question that arises is whether the biblical text offers any sign of an eventual incident that has caused Gideon experience a great distress and has made him struggle internally so hard. If not, what is the source of Gideon’s struggle then? It is not easy trying to answer these questions, yet the simplest answers would be a ‘no’ for the first one, and a ‘lack of faith’ for the second one. I argue that the response to both questions needs more elaboration beyond this. Due to the severe oppression of the Midianites,


33 Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 79.
Gideon seems to experience a great fear that has led him to a state of hopelessness and abandonment. God seems, for Gideon, to have forgotten his people by letting the Midianite oppression happen. This information is significant when analyzing Gideon’s life story because his fear seems to be a reflection of a state of despair and distress. It must be emphasized that Gideon is not the only one who seems to experience this fear; verse 7:3 shows that twenty-two thousand men leave Gideon as they tremble with panic after being recruited for war. This lets us claim that the distress experienced by the people of Israel for seven years because of the oppression of the Midianite has become part of the “collective consciousness.”

Thus in this section, Gideon’s fear is not the result of a flawed character, but he experiences this collective fear along with the rest of the oppressed people. Gideon’s response to the angel’s annunciation supports this line of reasoning: “Pardon me, my lord…But if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about…? But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian” (6:13). Having the divine calling on one side and the distress of the Midianite oppression on the other side, Gideon questions and rationalizes his divine calling and commissioning. He says, “But how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family?”

God assures Gideon that he “will strike down all Midianites, leaving none alive” (6:16). Regardless of God’s assurance, Gideon, out of his fear of the Midianites, hesitates and asks for a sign of confirmation. God grants it and consumes the meat and bread with fire on a rock.

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34 The term was coined by Emile Durkheim in 1893. See Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, ed. Steven Lukes (New York: Free Press, 2014), 39. Collective consciousness refers to the entire shared set of beliefs and values in a society.

35 It might also show that Gideon, by that time, lacks some life experience.

36 Considering the socio-cultural context where he is living, Gideon perhaps did not even know about the prophet’s message given in 6:7-10, as he was the youngest in his family, and probably was ignored. See I Samuel 16:1-13 when David, as the youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem, is ignored and was not invited to Samuel’s convocation. Only David’s father and his older brothers attended.

37 Haddox suggests that Gideon here “minimizes his status and his power” before God. See Haddox, “The Lord is With You, You Mighty Warrior,” 79.
4.3 Gideon and the Suspension of the Ethical

The next section is found in 6:25-32 where it is narrated the episode of God addressing Gideon in dreams. God commands him to take two bulls, the second bull from his father’s herd and the seven-year-old one, tear down his father’s Baal altar, cut down the Asherah pole, and offer a burnt offering. This task resembles in part the instructions given to the people of Israel: “Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.” Because Gideon does not escape from his obligation of not violating the Law as a participant of the covenant, Gideon obeys the Lord and does as he is commanded, but he does it by night because he was afraid of his father and the townspeople. He seems to fear that he probably would be violating the ethical norms of his society. The complexity of such task leaves no other option than rethinking this episode in Gideon’s life story as a divine test. Gideon is afraid and there is a good reason for that: May Gideon go against his own household taking the bulls, sacrificing them, and destroying his father’s idols without any consequences? On one hand, if Gideon obeys, he shows that he is courageous and has faith, but breaks his society’s ethical norms by dishonoring his household and stealing the bulls. On the other hand, if he does not act according to the divine command, he also sins for not being obedient to the voice of the Lord, and shows that he does not have faith at all. The problem does not have a solution in the ethical. Consequently, one should conclude that Gideon’s faith is being tested. He must act out of faith instead of fear to complete the task successfully. Once the test is finished and completed, Gideon’s faith grows. This also shows that according to the nature of the test given to Gideon, his performance of the task by night is in some way

38 By offering this, Gideon proves his faith.
40 I differentiate between Gideon’s moral fear in this context where he avoids offending his father and the townspeople based on the societal norms of his time from the collective fear he experiences at the beginning of the narrative where the fear has led him to a state of despair.
insignificant. What God wants is that Gideon may enter into another state—that he moves away from fear towards faith, and not simply that he shows he is capable or not of doing a task in a particular moment. Notwithstanding his previous fear and anxiety, Gideon passes the divine test by taking courage in faith that God is with him. In fact, this narrative in 6:25-32 resembles Abraham’s test of sacrificing his son Isaac in Gen. 22. In both cases, Kierkegaard’s notion of the teleological suspension of the ethical is present. Both Abraham and Gideon’s actions are ethically wrong, but religiously right. In Abraham’s case, the decision of sacrificing Isaac is not a result of human thinking, but a divine command. Abraham obeys despite the serious implications of the action given—committing murder. He proves his faith. In Gideon’s case, he suspends the ethical when he obeys the Lord. In doing so, Gideon goes against his own family by dishonoring them publically and damaging the property of his father. The act is itself a very risky one considering the society in which Gideon was living. The consequence of such doing is death. This is what the narrator shows in 6:30 when tells us that the townspeople demanded Gideon’s death. Gideon here proves his faith. This episode is important because the Spirit has not covered Gideon yet. Aside from the consequences, Gideon obeys the Lord, and as an outcome, the Lord delivers him from dying in the hands of the people by encouraging Gideon’s father to defend him vigorously: “But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, ‘Are you going to plead Baal’s cause? Are you trying to save him?…If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar” (6:31). As one may observe, this episode demonstrates that not only Gideon passes the divine test, but also that he has started his spiritual journey by moving away from fear towards faith. It should be noted that it is not coincidence that the narrator starts with the covering of Gideon by the Spirit in the next section.

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41 The Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard developed the concept of the “teleological suspension of the ethical” in 1843. See Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, tr. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 83-95. In this work, Kierkegaard claims that Abraham acts in the realm of the religious and not in the ethical, and for that reason, Abraham’s decision of sacrificing his son is religiously right while ethically wrong.
4.4 Gideon’s Emergence as Charismatic Leader

In 6:33-35 the narrator recounts the episode where the Spirit of the Lord comes over Gideon, and he calls his people to arms to fight against the Midianite army. The covering on Gideon by the Spirit marks the start of Gideon’s charismatic leadership. In verse 6:35 one also sees Weber’s first characteristic of charisma—the divine qualification of the leader. Gideon, by calling to arms, demonstrates that he has strengthened his faith and is willing to continue his journey of faith: “…and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him” (6:33).

The section 6:36-40 about Gideon asking for two more signs (the dew and the wool fleece) after the covering of the Spirit may be narratively misplaced as Haddox, following J. A. Soggin, highlights: “[It] makes little sense to have the request for a sign immediately following Gideon’s possession of the Spirit …There are a number of textual difficulties in this passage.”42 The implications of this would be relocating the section 6:36-40 in a better narrative context, probably between verse 6:24 and 6:25. Thus, one may have three signs asked by Gideon to confirm his commissioning before the covering of the Spirit. As Gideon asks for a third sign from God, Gideon’s faith is tested as he has been asked to destroy his father’s idols. With that test, God brings the dialectical process to a closure: Gideon must have faith and stop his ambivalence. There is no sense locating the sign of the fleece and dew after the covering of the Spirit where the Lord vouchsafes Gideon with charismatic authority, or even after the destruction of his father’s idols where Gideon proves his faith by obeying the Lord despite of the consequences.43 Furthermore, the second element of charismatic leadership is also seen here when the Spirit covers Gideon and he emerges as a charismatic leader without establishing any accountability. Yet the role of the people is validating Gideon’s leadership, this role is not about choosing him as in a democracy or making

42 Haddox, “The Lord is With You, You Mighty Warrior,” 80.

43 It is important to mention that the calling (commissioning) of Gideon and his emergence (establishment) as a charismatic leader are two different events, but related and inseparable. We should not confuse both, however. Before the covering of the Spirit, although Gideon has a calling, there is no sense discussing about Gideon’s leadership, since what was required of him was to have courage and accept his calling in faith, and not exercise any kind of dominion.
him accountable to the people, however. Gideon, as a charismatic leader, does not know of any human agency of control, except his own restraint.

4.5 Gideon’s Struggle with Faith

The narrator in 7:1-25 describes about how Gideon defeats the Midianite army. The context of this story is found in 6:33-35 when Gideon calls the Abiezrites to arms. One notes that Gideon summons the people to follow him in virtue of his charismatic authority, and sends messengers via Manasseh to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Here one also sees that the mission of Gideon is delimited at least ethnically and socially, as Weber speaks of the particularized leadership and dominion of the charisma-holder. For example, Gideon sends his message not to all the people of Israel, but to specific tribes, probably those that were more affected by the Midianite oppression. Once Gideon achieves his goal of gathering an army of thirty-two thousand men for the confrontation, the Lord talks to Gideon and tells him he would not deliver the victory against the Midianite camp with such an amount of people due to the fact that the people of Israel would think that their own strength had saved them (7:2). For that reason, Gideon announces that anyone who fears may be back home. The surprising fact is that twenty-two thousand men leave Gideon. The Lord talks to Gideon again and tells him that there were still many men. In this context, Gideon is commanded to separate men in two groups and take them to drink water: those who lap the water with their tongues would stay. The result was that nine thousand seven hundred men went home back. Thus, Gideon stays only with three hundred men, probably the weakest ones.

Tanner, commenting this particular episode, writes: “The reduction of Gideon’s army is familiar story often told from the perspective of emphasizing God’s ability to deliver whether by many or by few. While this is true, such an explanation falls short of doing justice in this context. The context is dealing with a struggle within Gideon himself.” 44 In this case, I agree with Tanner’s interpretation of the episode. Without Gideon asking, the Lord summons Gideon that if he is afraid to attack, he should go with his servant Purah and listen to what the Midianite guards were saying (7:10). Notwithstanding the other times where Gideon was afraid, this time he has been covered by the Spirit, so that Gideon is expected to

obey without any hesitation. Since he does not ask for another sign, one observes that in spite of his courage, Gideon struggles with his faith. In the end, Gideon goes to the Midianite camp with his servant, and after hearing a Midianite guard recounting the dream he had about a loaf of bread coming to the camp and his interpretation, Gideon is encouraged and worships the Lord due to the fact that the guards identify the loaf of bread with him. This particular episode shows us that Gideon’s main issue was his struggling with faith. During all this process, Gideon’s faith not only has been challenged and tested, but has also grown and been strengthened. As Weber notes, “[t]he charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life…if he wants to be a war lord, he must perform heroic deeds.” And it is this what one notices here: Gideon, as a charisma-holder, takes courage and in faith calls out his men to attack. This is narrated in 7:15–21. The narrator recounts in 7:22 that after Gideon’s men blew their trumpets, the Lord causes the Midianite to attack each other. This should not be interpreted, nonetheless, in the sense that the whole Midianite army died because of their confusion. In fact, fifteen thousand men do not die but stay with their kings. Thus, the text suggests that Gideon and his men must have courage and fight against them in order to capture their enemies. This is, therefore, the beginning of the combat and not the end. Because many of the Midianites were running away, the people of Israel have to run after them to capture them. Though the narrator does not tell us directly that Gideon was fighting, it would be a mistake to assume he was not. One observes that without a courageous Gideon leading the fight, the victory that the Lord granted had not been possible at all. His faith also makes the Israelites hold the victory. Again, Gideon proves his strength and courage by virtue of his charismatic authority.

In 8:1–3, Gideon’s leadership is challenged by the Ephraimites. The Ephraimites ask Gideon why they were not invited to fight Midian. The narrator informs us that the Ephraimites challenge Gideon vigorously and resent him. What one sees here is not simply a discussion between Gideon and the Ephraimites, but a power struggle. By minimizing his power and his tribe’s achievements, Gideon proves himself worthy by making the resentment subside. This episode is significant because the weaker Gideon’s character is, the less probability he is willing to minimize his power.

4.6 Gideon’s Vengeance

In 8:4-21 the narrator tells us about the pursuing of Zebah and Zalmuna, kings of Midian. Gideon was pursuing them, and after crossing the Jordan, he and his men got exhausted. Gideon, for that reason, asks for bread from the elders of Sukkoth. However, they refuse to give it to him. The group also goes to another city, Peniel, and asks the same request, and the elders there also refuse to give him bread. Gideon replies them that after he returns in triumph he will tear down their tower. Weisman, pointing out the unusual response by the elders, claims:

There is no certain knowledge as to the ethnic and political identity of these two groups. However, provided that they did belong to the Israelite population, two observations may be made: firstly, that the elders formed the governing body as far as decision-making was concerned, and secondly, that they represented (at least in the historical account) the extreme local, separatist approach which ran counter to the spirit of inter-tribal solidarity put forward by the judge-saviours.46

It is worth noting that the lack of recognition of Gideon’s judgeship from the elders does not detract from his charisma. In view of Weber’s theory, one may claim that by virtue of the divine authority vouchsafed to Gideon, it is the people’s duty to recognize him as being called by God. It is in this aspect that the elders of Sukkoth and Peniel fail, since their decision of not supporting Gideon’s mission by refusing his request is religiously evil. In that respect, the destruction of the towers and the punishment of the elders of Sukkoth and Peniel, though ethically wrong, may be religiously right.

A similar situation happens with the killing of Zebah and Zalmuna regarding Gideon’s vengeance of the blood of his own brothers. Gideon’s courageous character is seen once again. The fact that in the end Gideon indeed kills the kings of Midian and takes the ornaments of their camels’ necks is a proof that his previous command—that his firstborn Jether may kill the kings—is not based on a lack of courage and prowess. On the contrary, by Gideon killing the kings, he not only proves his character strength as a warlord and leader, but he also fulfills his religious obligation. As John Marshall Lang correctly states, Gideon’s action of killing the

murderers of his brothers is “according to the notions of the period, a duty demanded of him.” Though controversial, it seems that Gideon has a double right to kill the kings: as a warlord where he kills his enemies in virtue of his mission, and as a family-blood avenger.

4.7 Resolution of the Gideon Narrative

The resolution of the Gideon narrative is found in 8:22-27 where the people of Israel ask Gideon to rule over them, and where also Gideon requests gold from the people to make an ephod. In this section one comes to see the last two elements that characterize the charisma-holder: his remaining outside of the institutionalized routine and his rejection of any undignified pecuniary gain. In 8:22-23 Gideon is asked to rule over the people of Israel as a king because he had saved them from the Midianites. But Gideon rejects the offer by replying that only the Lord will rule over them. Although Weber considers kingship as part of the development and evolution of political charisma inasmuch as “the king is everywhere mainly a warlord,” the charismatic authority that holds the warlord can be stable or not, depending of the state of affairs: whether there is peace (unstable) or a chronic state (permanent). In Gideon’s case, his charisma is active while the fight against the Midianites lasts. As soon as the war ends and the victory is granted, Gideon’s charismatic authority becomes unstable. In fact, it remains that way throughout the biblical text. Thus, when Gideon rejects the kingship, on one hand, he is basically rejecting a patriarchal domination based on his leadership and achievements; as a charisma-holder, he knows that the source of his dominion is God. On the other hand, by rejecting the kingship, Gideon may be trying to glorify his heroic figure.

Concerning the economic motives, despite Gideon surprisingly requesting a gold earring from each person, Weber’s theory of charismatic


leadership still holds. The charisma-holder rejects not all gain, but that one which is undignified, methodical, and rational “in the sense of economic exploitation by the making of a deal.”\textsuperscript{51} The purpose of Gideon asking for the gold earring is not based on an ulterior motive to earn pecuniary gain as a source of income.\textsuperscript{52} This is reflected in the biblical narrative when Gideon does not make a deal with his followers, but asks for donations of gold. The response of the people of offering gladly their gold earrings supports this interpretation of the facts. Even in the presence of an eventual tension, Weber’s theory still holds in this narrative, as Weber argues, “[i]n the case of charismatic warrior heroes, booty represents one of the ends as well as the material means of the mission.”\textsuperscript{53}

As an additional comment, the last section found in 8:28-33 presents a series of textual and narrative issues. Except for the new information added in 8:30-32 regarding Gideon’s wives and children and Gideon’ death, the section seems to be an expansion, probably done by another narrator, of the previous section in 8:22-27, e.g., verse 8:28 expands what is said in verse 22, while 8:29 and 8:33-35 expand what has been narrated in verse 27.

**Concluding Remarks**

Notwithstanding the methodological usefulness of some of the more recent scholarship, Weber’s sociology of authority may still prove fruitful for biblical studies or leadership studies. By engaging Gideon’s narrative using Weber’s sociology of authority, one comes to see that despite the fact that there might be components that cannot be explained under such a paradigm, the Weberian theory offers us a model that helps us gain a


\textsuperscript{52} Regarding the reasons of why Gideon desires to make an ephod, a good explanation is that Gideon wants to use it as a memorial of the victory. Another interpretation, however, is that he pretends to use it for oracle purposes, as Sa-Moon Kang affirms in Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1989), 210. In any case, since Weber discusses charisma in a neutral sense, despite Gideon’s mistake of making a golden ephod causing the people of Israel stray, his charisma is not lost.

better understanding of the notion of dominion and authority in biblical leadership studies. That is, Weber’s exposition of authority lets us broaden our understanding of the biblical text.

In the particular case of Gideon, Weber’s theory extends our understanding of Gideon’s portrayal as a leader and warlord by paying attention to the fact that his judgeship is strongly shaped by his cultural-historical and socio-political context. One observes how the narrator does not try to hide Gideon’s initial fear or his struggle with faith. Instead, he clearly shows his readers Gideon’s real humanity. It would be really difficult if one tried to understand Gideon’s judgeship without exploring the social-political context where he develops such a dominion. Even more difficult is trying to grasp Gideon’s thought without paying attention to his understanding of the world and the different facets of his own life—social, psychological, and religious for instance. One sees not only that Gideon indeed struggles with his faith and that by virtue of his divine calling he progressively moves away from his state of hesitation, but also how Gideon develops further his character as a leader during his journey of faith.

Finally, I acknowledge that although one might question Gideon’s depiction as a strong figure in the biblical text in light of modern paradigms; yet for the people of Israel of his time, he emerged as a courageous and competent leader, as he continuously proved his faith and strength in life during his forty-year guidance. Gideon’s failures and shortcomings were expected from him inasmuch as he was not free from having struggles and hesitation. What was not expected from him, however, was being a failure regarding the fulfillment of his divine vocation, as Weber speaks of charismatic leaders. Whether Gideon fights against the Midianites using only his natural strength, or whether he does it on the Lord’s, or even a combination of both, the use of one or the other does not detract from Gideon’s achievements in light of the fact that the religious and the cultural were so ingrained in the social stratification of the Ancient Near Eastern societies—Israel was no exception.
TRINITAS EST UNUS DEUS: TRINITARIANISM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEGEL

Brent M. McCulley

Introduction

Perhaps no modern thinker casts a bigger shadow still today than the person of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).1 This is true not only for his influence on philosophy, but his philosophical influence on theology as well.2 Entering the scene at a peculiar time, Hegel attempted to synthesize various strands of thought such as the Christian tradition, Enlightenment thought, philosophy, and elements of Romanticism.3 Hegel therefore stands as one of the pillars of modern thought, and must be reckoned with in order to make any sense out of the theological climate in the twentieth century.4 While many, in re-constructing the trajectory of Hegel's thought, have tried to deemphasize the importance of Christianity in his system, the fact is that Christianity, as the consummate religion5 and


its dogmas, remains integral to a proper understanding of his system.\textsuperscript{6} Renewed interest in the importance of Christianity has led to a new appreciation for Hegel's appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{7} While the great philosopher took the doctrine from the classical Christian tradition, he significantly modified it in pronounced ways.\textsuperscript{8} The purpose of this exposition paper, therefore, is to explicate Hegel's doctrine of the Trinity in a clear, cogent, and concise manner.\textsuperscript{9} Different aspects of Hegel's doctrine of the Trinity, consequently, will be examined in relation to his philosophical system.

The Absolute

Important to understanding the workings of Hegel's system, and also Hegel's understanding of the Trinity, one must understand the importance of dialectic. Dialectic (διαλεκτική), which can be traced back to Socrates, is a methodological approach that enables two contradictory polarities to be synthesized in order to form a truth that contains both previous contradictory truths.\textsuperscript{10} For Schelling, God had an absolute identity (A=A)


\textsuperscript{8} For a cogent list of the stark differences between Hegel's modification to the classical doctrine of the Trinity with Augustine and Aquinas as examples, see the chapter “Hegel and Trinitarian Schematization” in “Kant, Hegel, and Schelling,” Cyril O'Regen in *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 257-262.

\textsuperscript{9} Much confusion has been had over Hegel's understanding of Spirit as opposed to Holy Spirit. For Hegel on the Holy Spirit, in relation to his trinitarian doctrine, see Emilio Brito, “L'Esprit Saint Selon Hegel,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 85, no. 4 (2009): 423–38.

\textsuperscript{10} There is no doubt that Hegelian dialectic is very different from Socratic dialectic; nevertheless, the former has its roots in the latter. See Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 27; 31-33.
and contained no differentiation or diversity.\(^{11}\) Hegel, on the other hand, rejected Schelling's philosophy of absolute identity and opted instead for an understanding of God that enabled him to account for both diversity and unity, identity and differentiation, or an identity in difference.\(^{12}\) Thus, Hegel hypothesized that the Absolute must have within itself all things not infinite; viz all finite things.\(^{13}\) Rejecting the absolute philosophical understanding of simplicity, one that allows for no variation in God, Hegel put all finite things within Absolute Spirit, enabling all finite things to unfold in a dialectical process from the infinite to multiplicity and from multiplicity back to the infinite.\(^{14}\)

The nature of the Absolute, as we have seen, is not Schelling's absolute identity, but rather contains within itself a dialectical process.\(^{15}\) This

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\(^{11}\) For a succinct explanation, see, Cooper, *Panentheism*, 109; 110.

\(^{12}\) “A subject and an object are indeed different. But they are not wholly unrelated or wholly *alien* to each other, for the other object known is the object-of-the-subject; that is, it is the subject's object. This is in microcosm Hegel's method. He begins with things that seem to have an identity in themselves and to be different or to be “opposed.” Then he shows that there is an “identity-in-difference,” so that they are not wholly alien to each other but are internally related,” Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 175.

\(^{13}\) Hegel understands God not as an eternal being with attributes (predicates) but as one of self-determination. God is nothing other than “self-determining, a self-positing in finitude, [which involves] distinction and contradiction, but [is] at the same time an eternal sublimating of this contradiction,” Lectures, 3.196. The particularity of finite spirit does not merely reflect on God and his predicates, but the particularity of finite spirit is part of the very nature of God and his reconciling and sublimating of all opposites and contradictions in a concrete, *not abstract*, way.

\(^{14}\) “For Hegel God is absolute spirit and man is relative spirit; or God is infinite spirit and man is finite spirit. To say that God is spirit means that he is creative power,” Tillich, *History of Christian Thought*, 410.

\(^{15}\) Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 9: “Dealing with something from the perspective of the Absolute consists merely in declaring that, although one has been speaking of it just now as something definite, yet in the Absolute, the A=A, there is nothing of the kind, for there all is one. To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black—this is cognition naïvely reduced to vacuity...In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the *True*, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Substance*,”10.
process is a part of the very nature of God or the Absolute. As is the nature of dialectic, the process is always triadic in structure in that it contains three phases. The movements are self-identity, otherness, and the synthesis of the two. Hegel's own terminology is as follows: being in itself (an sich), being for itself (für sich), being in-and-for-itself (das Anundfürsich).

These represent actual dialectical movements in the life of the Absolute that continually posit otherness to being in order to form a synthesis, being-in-and-for-itself. This is the process whereby Hegel saw one could arrive at absolute knowledge. Schelling also posited the One as a strict absolute identity. For Hegel, however, the dialectical process was not limited to the multiplicity outside of the one from which they flowed. The inner workings of the Absolute, as being-itself, being-for-itself, and being-in-and-for-itself, also contain within itself the manifestation of all finite things that subsequently unfold dialectically.

16 “The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence of consummating itself through its [historical] development,” Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 11.

17 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 14.

18 “The spiritual alone is the actual; it is essence, or that which has being in itself; it is that which relates itself to itself and is determinate, it is other-being and being-for-self, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is in and for itself,” Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 14.

19 See “Absolute Knowing, (D D.), 7.788 in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, 479-493. “The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm. Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History; but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance,” 493.

20 “This carried an important implication for Hegel's understanding of logic. Traditional logic is based on the law of non-contradiction (A is not non-A). As such it presupposes a static outlook toward reality. The German philosopher rejected the static outlook, turning instead to a dynamic understanding,” Grenz and Olson, 20th Century Theology, 34. Contained is Hegel's B is both A and non-A.

21 Hegel writes, “[The Absolute] must have this character [finitude] within itself...finitude must be posited in God himself, not as something insurmountable, absolute, independent, but above all as this process of distinguishing,” Lectures 3.190. See also, Dale M. Schlitt, Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), “Hegel's Reformulation of the True Content of Trinity, 11-85.
Trinity as History

As we saw, Hegel was instrumental in continuing the development of dialectical philosophy in the Romantic Era, by flipping the dialectical model stretching back to Plotinus on its side, making the process one intertwined with history. History for Hegel is the manifestation of God itself, the Absolute actually comprehends itself through the dialectical-historical process—through self-differentiation of finite spirit. The self-actualization is a part of the Absolute manifesting itself dialectically in order to grow in self-knowledge, and realize itself truly as Absolute Spirit. Therefore, every historical act has an enormous impact on the life of God as God comprehends himself. The goal, for Hegel, was absolute knowledge which unlike religion and art, could only be granted by philosophy. The knowledge of this dialectical historical process in the mind of Hegel, according to his system, was the very knowledge of God comprehending himself.

The historical process is seen, therefore, as progressive. Building on Lessing and the Romantics, Hegel saw the development of religious spirit

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22 “By history Hegel means the process of the growth of knowledge as well as the development of civilization and its institutions. Plato looked to eternal Forms...Aristotle, to the forms present in things; and Plotinus, to the One from which everything descends and ascends eternally. None looked to history as the manifestation and realization of the ultimate reality. For Hegel history is the progressive self-unfolding and self-realization of the Absolute,” Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 169.

23 It is important to note, however, that for Hegel, philosophy was a means by which the content of religion could be unpacked properly. Hegel did not see philosophy as antithetical to religion, and neither did he see it having its own content. Philosophy is merely the *aufhebung* of religion: both contain absolute truth, religion, however, in representational or symbolic form only. See Crites, *The Gospel According to Hegel*, 260, 261.

24 “Human spirit is a self-manifestation of the divine Spirit, and God is the absolute Spirit which is present and works through every finite spirit. All life processes are manifestations of the divine life, only they appear in time and space whereas in God they are in their essential nature. God actualizes his own potential in time and space, through nature, through history, through men. God finds himself in his personal character in man and his history in the different forms of his historical actualization. God is not a person besides other persons. The absolute Spirit of which Hegel speaks is not a being beside the finite spirit, but in God its essential reality is given. In time and space, it becomes actualized, yet at the same time estranged from its essential character,” Tillich, *History of Christian Thought*, 417.
from animism to polytheism, henotheism to monotheism, Judaism to Christianity, as the self-realization and comprehension of Absolute Spirit.\(^{25}\) Nevertheless, even Christianity and its Trinitarian purity can only properly be interpreted by philosophy, which offers the truest and most pure form of absolute knowledge rightly interpreting Christianity and the Trinity. In the words of Hegel himself, “The Truth, is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only in the end is it what it truly is.”\(^{26}\) The presence of God, therefore, is the historical process. The historical process is merely the self-actualization of the triune God through rigorous dialectic. It is precisely through the historical process in finite spirit, that God, the Absolute Spirit, is able to achieve consciousness or self-awareness. Hegel makes this relatively clear, “God is God only insofar as He knows Himself; His self-knowledge is His self-consciousness in man, is the knowledge man has of God, which advances man's self-knowledge in God.”\(^{27}\) God as Trinity is not just an ontological speculation, or the supreme reality, far above and beyond all things conceivable, but is near, around, and in all things.\(^{28}\) 

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\(^{25}\) Hegel outlines the development of the Infinite distinguishing itself through the finite as the logical, historical, and dialectical development of the religious consciousness. From the natural to the spiritual, from the spiritual to the aesthetic, from aesthetic to purpose, and from purpose to the consummate religion whose only purpose is the concept itself, see Lectures 3.191-195 for this development.

\(^{26}\) Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 11.

\(^{27}\) Hegel, *Encyclopädie*, § 565 as quoted in Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, 103. Mackintosh comments as follows, “Thus, it would appear, the Absolute has reality only in the thought of those who believe in Him. And history is now seen to be God’s realization of Himself though, or in, the process of human experience,” 103. This is only partially true, God does realize himself through the “process of human experience,” but God has reality in all created things as they dialectically actualize themselves. God comes to self-awareness through finite spirit, and therefore exists as a higher actuality in the mind of the Hegelian then in the mind, say, of the animists two thousand years ago. It is not so much that God only has existence “in the thought of those who believe in him” than it is that God is simply more aware of himself. History is for Hegel progressive, gradually rising to higher forms or levels of consciousness as God self-actualizes himself and finite spirit become unified with Absolute Spirit. Nevertheless, Hegel is adamant that concepts, abstractions, can only be known through historical recognition—here is no real existence independent of this recognition. Bubbio succinctly, “Hegel maintains that concepts cannot be known independently of human recognizable activity,” *Hegel, The Trinity, and I*, 133.
as Trinity is a historical dialectic, the very essence of God. This trinitarian dialectic is nearer our hands and feet, and is seen as a progression of all created things as history is propelled forward by this relentless and pervasive dialectic.\(^\text{29}\) World history, consequently, becomes more than a scientific exercise in the recapitulation of the development of societies. Rather, world history becomes metaphysics, the biography, or perchance more apropos, the \textit{auto-biography} of God.\(^\text{30}\)

**Pure Trinity Explained by Philosophy Alone**

As we have seen in Hegel, Philosophy is the means whereby one can achieve absolute knowledge. Christianity, while an amazing historical epoch in the self-actualization of God, is not complete.\(^\text{31}\) While Christianity offered the world instrumental new insights, such as God as Trinity as opposed to all the other monotheistic religions, these insights can only be properly interpreted by philosophy which is able to explicate the true and

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\(^{28}\) For Hegel, anything speculated about as extrapolated from reality is real but not concrete or actual, that is to say the idea has not gone through concretion. Therefore, the ontological Trinity can only become actual from abstraction through concretion, as it becomes actualized through the historical world-process. Allen explains, “Hegel insists that whatever is real must become concrete and manifest in the world. To speak of things merely as ideas is to speak of abstractions. Unless the ideas take sensible form in time and space, they are utterly unreal. This is true of God as well. To be real, God must become manifest, must become revealed, must become knowable,” \textit{Philosophy for Understanding Theology}, 179.

\(^{29}\) “Here we have the whole vision of the world as a process of the self-actualization of the divine essences in time and space...in man’s knowledge of God, God knows himself, and in man’s love of God, God loves himself,” Tillich, \textit{History of Christian Thought}, 417. Tillich compares God’s coming to knowledge of himself in Hegel as also in the thought of Spinoza. The key difference between the two, however, would be Hegel’s distinction between God and man, and hence his panentheism, and Spinoza’s absolute monism, his identity with God as world and world as God, and therefore his pantheism: \textit{natura naturans}.

\(^{30}\) “Thus the story of man is the history of God’s becoming, the self-evolution of Absolute Reason spelling itself out in the medium of space and time,” Mackintosh, \textit{Types of Modern Theology}, 108.

\(^{31}\) “The unity of essence and the Self having been implicitly achieved, consciousness, still has this \textit{picture-thought} of its reconciliation, but as a picture-thought,” Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, 478.
Science (Wissenschaft) is therefore a higher level of knowledge of the “unity of essence of the Self” than religious knowledge which is merely symbolic, representational, or picture-thought (Vorstellung). In other words, God understands or self-comprehends himself better, as humans come to self-knowledge and subsequently knowledge of God, by means of philosophy more than he does through religion. The so-called witness of the Holy Spirit finds its highest form in philosophy which is able to analyze the necessity and truth of these concepts. Although the content is the same, the history of the world must move from religion to philosophy as the hermeneutical tool for achieving absolute knowledge. While religion can offer profound insights to absolute knowledge symbolically, these insights are at best religious representations of absolute truth. Truth for Hegel is not merely an abstract metaphysical concept, but must be actualized through a particular history. This truth can only further be revealed through philosophical clarification of these religious symbols.

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32 Hegel quite unequivocally defines religion as “the consciousness of God” and “spirit as consciousness of its essence” (3.189). The Christian religion is viewed as the “consummate religion” or religion that “is objective to itself.” This is the Christian religion. Philosophy is the means whereby this religion is able to become the object or concept for itself. Philosophy therefore has the tools that can move beyond the symbolic nature of the Christian religion and examine its concepts,” Hegel, Lectures, 3.177-179.

33 Hegel states, “Until Spirit has completed itself in itself, until it has completed itself as world-Spirit, it cannot reach its consummation as self-conscious Spirit. Therefore, the content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does Science, what Spirit is, but only Science is its true knowledge of itself,” Phenomenology of Spirit, 488.

34 Hegel, Lectures, 3.183. See also, 3.187, “Theology does not know what it wants when it turns on philosophy.”

35 Hegel understands theology to err when the theologians deny they are making any presuppositions or when they assert their exegesis is merely passively understanding truth. This is where philosophy is superior to theology in ascertaining absolute truth or knowledge. “Philosophy is alone what is at present essentially orthodox...the basic truths of Christianity, are maintained and preserved by it,” Lectures 3.188. See also, Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, 108, 109.

36 Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, 147.
Immanent Trinity vs. Economic Trinity

There is a very important distinction that must be understood in regards to the Trinity \textit{ad intra} and the Trinity \textit{ad extra}, or in other words, the immanent or ontological Trinity as opposed to the economic Trinity. The former refers to God, as trinity, as he is in himself, the latter refers to God and the works that are outside of himself, or what Hegel calls “God in and for Himself.”\textsuperscript{37} Hegel, however, has a peculiar understanding of God, namely that in himself (\textit{in se}), while the supreme reality is not actually concrete but still the Absolute Idea.\textsuperscript{38} It is the realm of Universality, infinite abstract potential, that seems to be Hegel's understanding of Trinity \textit{in se}.\textsuperscript{39} That is to say that God apart from everything \textit{ad extra}, creation, the world, and everything that is distinct from God, are infinitely contained within Absolute Idea as \textit{potentia}, structured dialectically, but are not concrete.\textsuperscript{40} In

\textsuperscript{37} God as he is eternally without the world is God in and for himself, God before the creation of the world, see Hegel, \textit{Lectures}, 3.199.

\textsuperscript{38} Hegel, \textit{Lectures}, 3.200, 201. God as he is in himself is still in the nature of the eternal idea, an abstraction. This pure idea, however, does not remain abstract, but eternally determines itself. Patricia Marie Calton clarifies, “The intrinsic Trinity is God considered apart from the world as an abstraction universal with the interior divisions of God, God's self-objectification in knowing himself, and the knowledge that these are a unity,” Hegel's \textit{Metaphysics of God: The Ontological Proof as the Development of a Trinitarian Divine Ontology} (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, Burlington), 73.


\textsuperscript{40} Hegel recognizes a “Holy Trinity” that is “God himself, eternally triune,” but understands the distinctions not as a distinction of persons, begotten and spirited, but as eternal dialectic, that which distinguishes itself from itself, and that which sublates this distinction. Because the Trinity in itself has no actualized distinctions and therefore no actualized sublation, the eternal trinitarian dialectic is immediately sublimated, \textit{Lectures}, 3.201. In Hegel's own words he says, “This life is self-differentiation, self-determination, and the first differentiation is that spirit \textit{is} as this universal idea itself...this distinction is implicitly sublated insofar as it is precisely what posits itself as no distinction at all; hence the one remains present to itself in the other.” Hegel is able to call this eternal dialectical process, at least according to “the mode of sensibility” eternal love. For a look at the importance of the Trinity as love for Hegel, see Erik Schmidt, “Hegel Und Die Kirchliche Trinitätslehre,” \textit{Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie} 24, no. 3 (1982). He claims theology and philosophy have not read, or read and not understood, Hegel when it comes to the personality of God, and God as eternal love. “Hegel hat klar
other words, without the world God cannot actualize Himself, and there is no concrete God without the world.\textsuperscript{41} Therefore it is important to understand that while Hegel has at least a conceptual disruption (\textit{Entzwiehung}) between the immanent and economic Trinity, it is the economic Trinity as it self-actualizes itself in history that is \textit{concrete}, or more than a concept.\textsuperscript{42} “Thus,” muses Hegel, “the merely eternal or abstract Spirit becomes an 'other' to itself, or enters into existence, and directly into \textit{immediate} existence. Accordingly, it \textit{creates} a world.” \textsuperscript{43} Thus, the immanent

\textsuperscript{41} Hegel sees the starting point of his system as the universal, the absolute, therefore there is no doubt, as Hegel was a grandiose idealist, that ontologically all things are grounded in the universal idea. Nevertheless, when one proceeds epistemically, one must begin with what comes later, the realm of appearance as the “transition to the universal”. See Hegel, \textit{Lectures}, 3.215, 216. Because there \textit{is} a God, there is a world, that is to say God ontologically grounds the world, which is a part of God. But because there \textit{is} a world, there is a God, that is to say that the world epistemically grounds God. Hegel writes, “God is the creator of the world; it belongs to his being, his essence, to be the creator. Insofar as he is not creator he is grasped inadequately,” \textit{Lectures} 3.200. See also 3.204.

\textsuperscript{42} Bubbio very instructively clarifies, “To consider the two ‘trinities’ in such a way that the economic Trinity temporarily or logically follows the immanent Trinity would be inaccurate. There is only \textit{one} Trinity, and the distinction depends on our finite nature, which is forced to distinguish between inward and outward relationships to grasp their complexity. However, after this distinction is clarified, it is appropriate to claim, albeit inadequately, that the immanent differentiation enables the economic differentiation. In other words, precisely because God is, \textit{ab aeternum}, self-identity, self-differentiation, and self-return, the divine history features the creation of the world, the incarnation of Christ, and the consummation of all finite things in the Spirit. The Trinity is ‘true’ because it is a representation of God’s essence, which can also be logically expressed as unity, differentiation, and return,” \textit{Hegel, the Trinity, and I}, 139.

\textsuperscript{43} Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, 467. But see pp. 467-478. See also \textit{Lectures}, 3.199, “God creates the world and posits the separation. He creates both nature and finite spirit. What is thus creates is at first another, posited outside of God. But God is essentially the reconciling to himself of what is alien, what is particular, what is posited in separation from him. He must restore to freedom to his truth what is alien, what has fallen away in the idea's self-disruption, in its falling away from itself...these are not external distinctions...they are the activity...of absolute spirit itself.” It seems that the necessity of
Trinity contains the dialectical structure, this is real but not yet concrete, and necessarily manifests itself producing the economic Trinity through concretion.\footnote{O'Reagan against Hegel, “Hegel admits a triadically shaped divine as the non-temporal ground of the economy. It is essentially on the basis of what is at least a facsimile of the immanent Trinity that the activities of creation, redemption, and sanctification are associated with the agency of the Son and the Spirit respectively,” \textit{Oxford Handbook of the Trinity}, 257. While the dialectic is the same in the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, it is the economic Trinity that is \textit{concrete} in that it has a true distinction, opposition to overcome in finite spirit whereas the unity of opposite in God as God is immanently is merely conceptual. God must, therefore, actualize himself and assert his true freedom through finite spirit and not just abstractly in the less real immanent Trinity. This actualization, however, is not volitional but is logical and dialectical, thus it is necessary and inevitable.}

Although one can conceive of God apart from the world, God cannot exist apart from the world because God \textit{qua} God necessarily, that is to say by nature, is the Creator God, and hence there must always be creation. Creation for Hegel is not a free act rooted in the will (\textit{voluntas}) of the absolute God, but is the necessary liberation of God's infinite power which logically unfolds dialectically.\footnote{“In this way, creation externalizes the 'inner dialectic of the divine life' in the being of the world,” Calton, \textit{Hegel's Metaphysics of God}.} Suffice it to say that Hegel's understanding of God in himself as immanent is only an abstraction or an idea, whereas God economically is merely the realization of the abstracted eternal immanent idea.\footnote{Hegel, \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion}, 266-292.} The distinction of Trinity immanent vs. Trinity economic is not so distinct in Hegel's thought as in classical theology. In fact, they appear to be two sides of the same coin.\footnote{One may perhaps be thinking of Rahner's Rule, “The economic Trinity \textit{is} the immanent Trinity.”} Both ontological and economic Trinity are extremely important for Hegel. It is also important to understand that Hegel's ontological God is still Triune insofar as God is eternal dialectic, yet this should be qualified. God is eternally Triune not as self-existing or self-subsisting, mutually related eternal persons. Rather, without finite spirit, this triadic moment in Spirit (immanent Trinity) is as
follows: essence, being-for-self or otherness, and being-for-self-as knowledge of itself in the other. This immanent triadic structure, however, is abstract, and without finite spirit “the distinctions made are immediately resolved as soon as they are made.”

The dialectical process is God as he is in himself, distinguishing that which is not himself from himself, and consequently reconciling both of these parts of himself in a new synthetic form of identity. Even still, the ontological Trinity in itself is not concrete, but is still un-actualized power, the Absolute Idea. Given this schema, it can be summarized hitherto that Hegel's Trinity is Triune, not hypostatically but dialectically, the economic Trinity epistemically grounds the eternal idea in the order of knowing, and the creation of the world is a necessary logical process of the Absolute Idea to self-knowledge—not of divine fiat—but of God's inevitable self-differentiation from himself which necessarily leads to finite spirit and the created order.

**Modalistic Trinitarianism**

Both the immanent and economic Trinity are very important for Hegel although for different reasons. Another very crucial point in understanding Hegel's *Trinitätslehre* is the way Hegel conceives of the Trinity economically. We have seen how Hegel did not draw a sharp distinction between the ontological and the economic Trinity in that God *ad intra* is not tri-personal self-subsisting being. The realm of Universality is the eternal idea which means that there is no eternal ontological Trinity that can exist apart from the world. The trinity ontologically becomes concrete as it is manifested in

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50 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 465.

51 Hegel defines personality on “what is based upon freedom,” personality is not self-subsisting individuality, but surrendering separateness to another, to and for another. *Lectures*, 3.210, 211. Hegel uses friendship as an example, giving up your abstract ideal for another and because of this movement, these are sublated, and the particular personality is once more concrete through the movement of abstract to particular, the giving up of the aforesaid, and the sublimation into a new concrete...such is the dialectical movement of love.
creation, historically as the Eternal Idea unfolds. That is to say that the ontological Trinity becomes concrete via the dialectical manifestation of the economic Trinity through nature and spirit or finite spirit. Because the ontological Trinity only becomes concrete through the historical process through finite spirit, God truly is a Trinity but only becomes concretely a Trinity through οὐσιόμα or dispensatio. Hegel discusses the “three persons” of the Trinity as being revealed in different aspects of the historical process via different modes of existence.\(^\text{52}\) Hegel thinks it better to think about God as three “moments.”\(^\text{53}\) These moments manifest themselves through finite spirit, a dialectical (not mysterious) process that allows God to distinguish himself, and sublimate this distinguishing.\(^\text{54}\) God self-actualizes himself dialectically through the historical process progressively.\(^\text{55}\) This means that God as Father, God as Son, and God as

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\(^{52}\) Marshall surveys Hegel and subsequent theologies that are Theologia crucis and suggests that the re-positioning of the Trinity through history helped relieved centuries of agony from the Patristics through Scholasticism of trying to reconcile the numerical and metaphysical problems of the Trinity. With this problem resolved, these theologians as a consequence did not have to worry about what “nature” they predicated suffering on Christ, thus gave way to suffering God theologies. See Marshall, The Absolute and the Trinity, 160: “For Trinitarian theology in the Hegelian vein we have been describing, the unity of God is not, in the end, the sort of thing that could be reckoned with conceptually at all. The divine unity is not a state of affairs, unique to be sure, that might be approached with a conceptual and explanatory strategy. It is not so much the unity given by an essence or nature numerically the same for Father, Son, and Spirit as the unity realized in a unique and unfathomable sequence of temporal actions and events, the cross and Resurrection of the incarnate Son. As such, the unity of the Triune God is not the sort of thing that can be conceptualized, and so poses no conceptual problem to be solved. It can only be told of, narrated, or depicted as the climax of creation’s great drama of alienation and reconciliation, now espied in the innermost life of God.”

\(^{53}\) Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 465, 466.

\(^{54}\) “The nature of God is indeed not a mystery (μυστήριον) in the ordinary sense of the term, and least of all in the Christian religion, for in it God has communicated the knowledge of Himself, He has shown what He is, He has revealed Himself,” Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, 3.206

\(^{55}\) Bubbio writes, “Hegel considers the Trinity in an unorthodox manner—not as three persons, as is common in the Christian orthodox doctrine, but as ‘one person in a trinity of personifications or gestalts,” Hegel, the Trinity, and I, 146.
Spirit are not three *persona*, but rather are three different successive modes of God as God self-actualizes himself historically and dialectically.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, while it is perhaps injudicious to apply an ancient theological heresy to Hegel's philosophical system, the comparisons can be further seen by means of the differences between Hegel's modalism and the general ancient conceptualization. For starters, traditional modalism, that is modalistic monarchianism, generally conceived of one primary God, “The Father,” who was the sole source of deity (μονάρχης).⁵⁷ The persons of the “Son” and the “Spirit” do not have independent existence or subsistence but rather are manifestations of one and the same deity. Whether these are successive economic modes or not does not belie the fact that the first person has ontological priority, is the sole substance, in a traditional modalistic scheme. Hegel, on the other hand, seems to identify the Absolute Idea with the Father, an abstraction.⁵⁸ Therefore, in Hegel's modalism, it is not the First but the Third “person” that has priority. Unlike ancient modalism, it is reconciling love of the Spirit that is prioritized, although it still has to actualize this personality historically through spirit and finite spirit.⁵⁹

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⁵⁶ “[But] God is not a person. He is spiritual...God comes to self-consciousness in man...[This] process in which God creates the world and fulfills himself in the world is the means whereby the infinite abundance of the divine life grows in time and space. God is not a separate entity, something finished in himself [*a se*], but he belongs to the world, not as a part of it, but as the ground from which and to which all things exist. This is the synthesis of the divine and human spirit,” Tillich, *History of Christian Thought*, 418.

⁵⁷ Modalistic Monarchianism in the pre-Nicene church was the “vigorous affirmation that there was only one God, the Father...Father and Son did not stand for real distinctions, but were mere names applicable at different times [Noetus]...the Godhead [w]as a monad...which expressed itself in three operations [Sabellius],” J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 121, 122.

⁵⁸ Hegel writes “When we say 'God,' we speak of him merely as abstract; or if we say, 'God the Father,' we speak of him as the universal,” *Lectures*, 3.205.

⁵⁹ See O'Regan, *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 261.
God as Father, Son, and Spirit

Although Hegel's terminology is not easy, and often times not extraordinarily clear, it does seem that Hegel's abstruse trinitarian categories can be applied to traditional categories, albeit his schema is certainly not traditional. This helps in identifying Hegel's modification of the classical doctrine given his philosophical emphasis. God as “Father,” or the Kingdom of the Father, would be what Hegel calls the Absolute Idea. The Father is viewed, by Hegel, as the entire immanent Trinity (knowing self as subject, object, and subject-object), a concept which is not yet concrete or actualized.60 The Father, however, is the eternal abstraction that is not concrete in himself, he exists potentially and abstractly. The “Son” is related to the Father in that the Son is “Not-Father,” just as the Father is Father and “Not-Son.”61 The Son dialectically negates the Father by manifesting itself, becoming actual, in nature and finite spirit.62 The Son, or the Kingdom of the Son, is a dialectical principle of negation and therefore the manifestation which stands in contradistinction to the “Father.”63 This opposition, however, does not persist, because there is once again a dialectic reunion of the “Father” and “Son” in the “Holy Spirit,” or Kingdom of the Spirit. “Holy Spirit,” which is different from Hegel's understanding of Spirit in general (Geist) is the sublimating principle that dialectically unifies both “Father” and “Son” in

60 “[Hegel sees] God the Father, as subsuming in itself the logical stance of the immanent Trinity as an entirety,” Bubbio, Hegel, the Trinity, and I, 139.

61 The Son is the “other” to the Father, an act of differentiation that is sublated by the movement of the “spirit,” which Hegel calls “a play of love.” Nevertheless, without nature, finite spirit, the world, etc., the determination is still merely an abstract general distinction. This movement, however, either abstractly, or concretely (the creation of the world), is the movement of the son. “From this side of the primal division of the idea is to be conceived in such a way that the other, which we have also called “Son,” obtained the determination of the other as such...this other, released as something free and independent, is the world, as such,” Hegel, Lectures 3.217.

62 Hegel, Lectures, 3.218, 234.

63 “Logically, God is complete as immanent Trinity, but it is through those internal relationships that it is externalised and concretised in the spatio-temporal domain,” Bubbio, Hegel, the Trinity, and I, 139.
a higher manifestation, a literal incarnation of Geist an sich into a particular mode of finite spirit.\textsuperscript{64}

Jesus, therefore, is the man who instantiates this deeper philosophical truth—that God and man are symbolically two sides to the same coin, striving for absolute unification.\textsuperscript{65} Jesus is not qualitatively different than any other human being, he merely is the \textit{first} human being to realize this about God and Man\textsuperscript{66} and therefore his death coincides with the origin and rise of Christianity (the consummate religion)—a very important event in the historical process of God's self-actualization.\textsuperscript{67} The death of Christ, therefore, is another dialectical turn wherein the “Holy Spirit” is able to proceed forth.\textsuperscript{68} This “Holy Spirit” manifests itself in the Church, the

\textsuperscript{64} It is important to note that while we are attaching classical theistic labels to Hegel's Trinitarian dialectic, God for Hegel is the entire dialectical process, not just one instantiation of it: not merely “Father,” or “Son,” or “Holy Spirit,” but “the totality of the process of self-expression and self-knowledge,” Calton, Hegel's \textit{Metaphysics of God}, 82.

\textsuperscript{65} Hegel writes of the necessity of this occurrence, “the substantiality of the unity of divine and human nature comes to consciousness for humanity in such a way that a human being appears to consciousness as God, and God appears to it as a human being. This is the necessity and need for such an appearance,” \textit{Lectures}, 3.237. Calton helps clarify as well when he states, “In Christ people experience this human [Jesus] in which they come to know God as man. In Christ, they see a real unity of humanity and divinity,” Calton, Hegel's \textit{Metaphysics of God}, 104. This is important in Hegel's progressive understanding of finite spirit's ability to overcome evil and be reconciled to the good, absolute spirit. In Christianity, man has risen from the animal spirit to a higher spirit. Philosophy, once more, brings finite spirit to a closer unity to Absolute Spirit.


\textsuperscript{67} Hegel, \textit{Lectures}, 3.240-250. For Hegel, however, Jesus was not just one of perhaps any human that could have been the “God-man,” but really was “sent” by God, however the metaphor plays out. Christ is the “God-Man” in that he perfectly embodies the divine Idea. That the unity as an abstract idea necessitates the actualization historically in time, as God is united with finite spirit. Crites explains, “The point on which he steadily insists, though, is the uniqueness of this Incarnation. He attempts to show that, in principle, there could be only one Incarnation, in one individual human being. It must be in a human being, of course, because only man is implicitly Spirit, infinite consciousness. I think it is evident that in Hegel's judgment the identity of God and man could not have occurred explicitly in one man had it not been implicit in all,” 255, but see 254-258.

\textsuperscript{68} “Jesus was the first to catch sight of a vast speculative truth...He perceived that God and man are one,” Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, 109. The absolute negation of
“Body of Christ,” which dialectically comes forth from the negation of the negation, producing the Spirit or love. This Spirit continues on dialectically towards the telos which is absolute unification between God and Man.

**Trinity as Theodicy**

Another very important aspect of Hegel's trinitarian thought is the Trinity as explanatory power to the theodicy problem. Unlike other monotheistic religions, Christianity has the doctrine that God is not merely one, but is three-in-one. Hegel makes hearty use of the Trinity to explain the existence of evil. While Hegel does not call it sin, he sees the primary problem as reconciliation. All things, all opposites must be synthesized or reconciled to one another. For Hegel, God is Absolute Spirit, and humanity is finite spirit. Because God needs to manifest himself and Christ on the cross in Hegel's system—his God forsakenness—can be seen, even when Hegel is unquoted, in the Christology, for example, of men like Barth, Moltmann, Balthasar, etc. The overwhelming flood of “suffering God” theologies can, no doubt, be traced back to the influence of Hegel however subtle or unknown the influence.

69 “Now, however, a further determination comes into play—God has died, God is dead, this is the most frightful of all thoughts, that all that is eternal, all that is true is not, that negation itself is found in God,” Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 91. See pp. 91-100.

70 Mackintosh explains succinctly, “As pure abstract idea God is Father: as going forth eternally into finite being, the element of change and variety, God is Son; as once more sublating or canceling this distinction, and turning again home enriched by this outgoing in so-called self-manifestation or incarnation, God is Holy-Spirit. Such a Trinity, clearly, represents that which is in no sense eternal but only coming to be; it has no meaning, or existence apart from the finite world,” *Types of Modern Theology*, 105.

71 See Hegel, *Lectures*, 3.224-227 where Hegel recounts the Genesis mythology of the Fall.

72 God must therefore reconcile this other to the divine; God must overcome the independent world must be reconciled and restored to unity,” Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 180.


74 Marshall writes, “Finitude, though inevitably brings with it alienation or estrangement (Entfremdung), and thereby evil, suffering, and death. This Christianity represents as creation’s fall into sin,” *The Absolute and the Trinity*, 151.
come to self-actualization through finite spirit, finite spirit is necessary to the self-actualization of God. Nevertheless, this finite spirit, because it is inherently finite and not infinite, exists as estrangement or evil. Crites comments, “For Hegel, however, the evil of the world consists precisely in its being other than its divine essence.” Hegel, therefore, makes evil simply a necessary ingredient of the dialectical world process that continually reconciles opposites historically thereby overcoming estrangement through reconciliation: the actualization of God. God cannot remain God in himself, for this is merely an abstraction that finite spirit is able to conceive of God. No, the essential nature of God makes it a necessity for God to actualize himself through finite spirit and therefore overcome evil through a higher, dialectical good. Hegel

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75 Hegel, Lectures, 3.223, humanity for Hegel is implicitly good as it remains as a concept, a concept contained in the absolute idea, but as an actuality, or as it exists naturally, the will of humanity is evil. Both are necessary and both are presupposed, these antitheses are then sublated into a synthesis. Allen explains, “We can now see from another perspective that finitude is evil not because it is limited but because it is only a stage in the realization in time and space of the nature of God. The finite is evil when it is seen as a stage that must “pass away.” The finite must come to an awareness that it is not truly independent but that it is united to the Infinite as a stage in the life history of the Infinite. The finite is evil not in itself [conceptually] but only in contrast to the final stage of a process,” Allen, Philosophy for Understanding Theology, 180.

76 Crites, Dialectic and Gospel, 507.

77 The connection of the Trinity and theodicy is very much to the fore in that evil and suffering are justified in that they come to be regarded as essential features of divine becoming,” O'Regan, Oxford Handbook of the Trinity, 261.

78 Hegel explains that finite spirit can conceptualize God in three different ways: “God is the absolute idea for thought...second, God is the eternal idea...for sensible intuition, for representation...Third, God comes to be...for subjectivity, for sensibility,” Lectures 3.197, 198. These are the three dialectical aspects or modes of God as they are conceptualized epistemically by finite spirit, “from our own standpoint.” The first is universality or the eternal idea, the second would that which distinguishes, particularity or nature, and last singularity would be finite-spirit or humanity. This triadic structure is the tour de force of Hegel's entire scientific system.

79 The Fall, to use Christian language, is necessary...The Fall is a necessary stage in the life of God. The fall is not only necessary; it is also the source of a greater good. Without finitude, God in all the richness of divine diversity remains unrealized. God remains merely potential, not actual. By the fall, God's richness becomes actual,” Allen, Philosophy for Understanding Theology, 180.
grounded his theodicy in what he saw as excellent philosophical exegesis, and was quite proud of his theodicy seeing it as highly cogent and one of the foundations of his system.\textsuperscript{80} The trinitarian theodicy, therefore, is not only an argument for the greater good, but is a necessary self-expression of God's self-actualization in order for the fullness, plentitude, and dialectical richness of the Trinity to be actualized through history. Evil thus becomes necessary for a greater divine Good.\textsuperscript{81} This necessity does not lie in God's will, but rather, is situated in the essence of God.\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Trinity as Panentheism}

Up until now we have considered the nature of the Absolute, Hegel's understanding of Trinity as it is immanently, as it is economically, as it is through history through successive moments, and as it relates to Hegel's theodicy. The last topic we will review is another feature that makes Hegel's understanding of Trinity very unique; namely, Hegel's understanding of Trinity as panentheism.\textsuperscript{83} We have seen for Hegel, God necessarily and logically actualizes himself through nature and finite spirit, which means that the world is ontologically a part of the essence of God:

\textsuperscript{80} Crites remarks, “It always pleased Hegel to defend some traditional doctrine which Enlightenment rationality had loftily denounced as offensive, degrading, and superstitious. So now he is again in a position to expose the simple-mindedness and brittleness of the position of the abstract understanding in its attacks on the doctrine of original sin. Hegel sees, as most of his predecessors did not, that original sin has nothing to do with biological inheritance, that it is rather a claim for the inevitability, the inescapability of sin,” \textit{The Gospel According to Hegel}, 251.

\textsuperscript{81} “Nature and finite spirit are other than God—or belong to the self-othering of God—and as such are evil...An important feature of the regime of dialectic is that suffering and death is ingredient in self-development of the divine subject which avails of matter, time, and history to come to itself,” O'Regan, \textit{Oxford Handbook of the Trinity}, 262.

\textsuperscript{82} Marshall contrasting the classical Christian theodicy with Hegel's, “Creation and reconciliation are free and generous acts of the Triune God, and as such are wholly contingent. They spring from God's will, not his nature,” 152.

\textsuperscript{83} Panentheism is an umbrella term that incorporates theologies and philosophies that define God as a part of the world, but also distinct from the world. In a word, “God and the world are ontologically distinct and God transcends the world, but the world is [also] in God ontologically,” Cooper, \textit{Panentheism}, 27.
world history is divine history. Nevertheless, God is not strictly identified with merely the world or nature, otherwise there would be no room for distinctions; nature and finite spirit are ontologically a part of God, yet do not exhaust God's being, as God uses the aforesaid as a means to actualize a determinateness that is lacking in the universal idea.

Hegel is not shy in his understanding of his concept of Trinity as he saw it as a mediating position between Enlightenment rationalism and subjective pietism. Hegel opts to stand in the tradition that stretches back to the Neo-Platonists, up through Jakob Böhme, who he credits as the first to see Trinity in all aspects of life. While Hegel uses terms coined and utilized by Christendom for centuries, it seems clear that he gives them a new meaning in order to fit his new panentheistic, logical-dialectical understanding of the Trinity. While Hegel rejects defining Trinity as something ontologically other than the world, a substantial being who contains predicates, he also firmly rejects the simple identification of God and the world, the world and God—therefore, Hegel's understanding of Trinity as necessarily creating and containing the world ontologically, yet being more than the world as the absolute idea, fits nicely into what some recent philosophical theologians have called dialectical-historical panentheism, or narrative dialectical panentheism.

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84 Hegel, *Lectures*, 3.200, 204.

85 Hegel, *Lectures*, 3.211, 212.

86 Hegel, *Lectures*, 3.267-270.


88 God is three persons, but not as defined by Nicea hypostatically relating to each other, but three logical dialectical persons or modes. Christ is the God-Man, but not as the logos born of a virgin with two natures defined by Chalcedon, but as one who instantiates the absolute idea, the unification of the divine and human ontologically. Jesus' dies for all, but his death is not about atonement for sins, but is dialectical sublation. The point is sufficiently clear.

89 Cyril O' Regan, Professor of Theology at Notre Dame, in his *Heterodox Hegel*; and John Cooper, Professor of Philosophical Theology at Calvin Seminary, in his *Panentheism*, 117.
To sup up, Hegel's Trinitarian formula is one that is still highly debated today; nevertheless, various contours of his trinitarian schema are generally agreed upon. We have attempted to touch on but a few of the general outlines of Hegel's trinitarian thought, ones that have more agreement than disagreement between Hegel scholars today. Of these we discussed Hegel's understanding of the Absolute, his concept of Trinity immanently, economically, and through history. We discussed his idiosyncratic form of trinitarian modalism, his trinitarian theodicy, and last his trinitarian panentheism.
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