

Divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism

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Abstract: Divine temporality is all the rage in certain theological circles today. Some even suggesting that the doctrine of the Trinity entails divine temporality. While I find this claim a bit strong, I do think that divine temporality can be quite useful for developing a robust model of the Trinity. However, not everyone agrees with this. Paul Helm has offered an objection to the so-called Oxford school of divine temporality based on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. He has argued that this form of divine temporality entails Arianism. In other words, divine temporality suffers from an inadequate doctrine of the Trinity. In this paper I shall first articulate the so-called Oxford school of divine temporality. From there I shall develop some of the Oxford school's theological benefits that help flesh out the doctrine of the Trinity, and assuage the charge of Arianism. Then I shall offer an examination and refutation of the Arian charge to divine temporality in order to show that the divine temporalist can maintain a robust Trinitarian theology.

What is Divine Temporality?

In order to understand what divine temporality is it is helpful to see what it is contrasted against. Divine temporality is a denial of the claim that God is atemporal or timeless. To say that God is timeless is to deny of God any aspects of time.¹ Of course one cannot deny time of God unless she has some understanding of what time is. Classical theists like Augustine, Boethius, Peter Lombard, Anselm, and Aquinas offer clear accounts on the nature of time and divine timelessness. Thinkers of this sort hold to a relational theory of time where time exists if and only if change or motion exists. Any kind of change, be it intrinsic or extrinsic, constitutes time.²

¹ (Fox 2006, chapter 1).

² For example, see Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, Book I, Distinction VIII. Augustine, *The Trinity*, IV and V.2. Augustine, *City of God*, XII. Some might find the claim that even extrinsic change is excluded from God to be contentious. The idea is that even a timeless God must be subject to mere Cambridge change. This is contrary to what the Medieval theologians held for they thought that a simple God can have no accidental properties at all, and a timeless God can undergo no changes whatsoever. Hence, the denial that God is really related to creation. See, (Mullins 2013). (McWhorter 2013).

They also hold to a presentist ontology of time whereby only the present moment of time exists. The past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist.³ Gregory of Nyssa puts the matter rather poetically by saying that “time’s lapse sweeps away with it all existence in the past, whereas expected existence gains substance from our hope.”⁴ These thinkers also hold to endurantism about identity and persistence through time. An object persists through time by existing as a whole, or all at once.⁵

In light of these commitments on the nature of time we can state what divine timelessness entails. Classical Christian theists held that God is timeless if and only if He necessarily exists without beginning, without end, and without succession or moments in His life. God suffers no intrinsic or extrinsic change, and stands in no real relations with creation. God exists as a whole, or all at once, in a timeless present that lacks a before and after. This timeless present also lacks temporal location and extension.⁶

Divine temporality is a rejection of this view. It can come in a variety of forms but all true temporalists agree that God is eternal in that He exists without beginning and without end, but God is temporal in that He has succession or moments in His life.⁷ In this paper I shall focus my attention on the so-called ‘Oxford school’ of divine temporality since the objection that I consider from Paul Helm is aimed at this school of thought.⁸

Just like Classical theism, the Oxford school holds to a presentist ontology and an endurantist theory of persistence through time. However, on the Oxford school, time is absolute—time can exist without change. All that is needed for time to exist is an enduring object that can possibly change. A necessarily existing God fits the bill since God is an enduring being. The Oxford school agrees with Classical theism that God exists as a whole, or all at once, but denies that God does so in a timeless present. Further, the Oxford school rejects the classical doctrine of divine immutability. The Oxford school holds that God is weakly immutable in that God’s essential nature cannot undergo any changes. However, God can undergo accidental and relational changes as He actualizes His power in new ways. Again, the claim from the Oxford school is that time exists if there exists an enduring being that can possibly change. Thus, time is a necessary concomitant of God’s eternal existence.⁹ It exists because a personal God exists.¹⁰

³ Augustine, *City of God* XI.21 and *Confessions*, XI.20. Anselm, *Monologion* 21, 22, and 24. Also, *Proslogion* 1319, and 22. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate* QII. John Marenbon, ‘Medieval Metaphysics II: Things, non-things, God and Time’, in (Poidevin, et al. 2009) (Visser and Williams 2008, chapter 6). (Staley 2006)

⁴ *Against Eunomius* I.42.

⁵ Endurantism plays an important role in Anselm’s argument to divine timelessness in the *Monologion*. For more on endurantism in classical thought see (Pasnau 2011, chapter 18).

⁶ See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 10.2. (Philoponus 2006, 65). Anselm’s *Monologion*, *Proslogion*, and *Concordia*. (Oresme 1968, 163-5). (Strong 1907, 275).

⁷ I say ‘true temporalists’ as a way of excluding Barthians who claim to be temporalists, but affirm all that divine timelessness holds. Karl Barth affirms that God exists without beginning and without end, but denies succession in God’s eternal life. (Barth 1975, III, 2, 438-9).

⁸ William Lane Craig gives this name to a series of views that hold to metric conventionalism. William Lane Craig, ‘Timelessness and Omnitemporality’, in (Ganssle 2001, 157). It is somewhat misleading to refer to the Oxford school as a unified theory since its alleged adherents differ on various issues. For instance, Alan Padgett holds that God’s life cannot be measured after the moment of creation, whereas Richard Swinburne and Dean Zimmerman hold that God’s life can be measured after creation.

⁹ Samuel Clarke in his fifth reply to Leibniz. (Alexander 1956, 104).

¹⁰ (Lucas 1989, 213).

The Oxford school also holds to a version of conventionalism about the metric of time. Time cannot be measured unless there are laws of nature that provide a uniform periodic process by which one can develop a metric. In the absence of uniform laws of nature, time can have a topology—events can be earlier and later than each other—but time will lack an intrinsic metric. There is no truth to statements about the length of temporal intervals in the absence of uniform laws of nature.¹¹

On this account God exists in unmetrified time prior to His free act of creating the universe. In this ‘dead time’ there is no intrinsic change.¹² God can choose to create the universe if He wants and enter into covenantal relations with His creatures if He so desires. Upon creating the universe, He would bring about change in His life because He is performing an action that He has not previously performed. His present would be in a one-to-one correspondence with the cosmic present of the universe. His eternal present would set the boundary for the universe’s cosmic present. (It would also set the boundary for the present of any other universe that God might create. Assuming, of course, that the concept of a multiverse is coherent.) God’s life would contain a before and after just like every other enduring being. Further, in creating a world with uniform laws of nature, God creates a world with a temporal metric. Hence, “we can date God’s acts by the time at which they occur on the universe’s clock. And we can even say that they last as long as those events in the universe with which they coincide.”¹³

What Are the Benefits of Divine Temporality?

There are several benefits of adopting the Oxford school’s account of divine temporalism, but I can only mention a few. I shall focus on benefits that help with articulating the doctrine of the Trinity, and help with assuaging the charge of Arianism. From here on, I shall refer to the Oxford school of divine temporality simply as divine temporality, and speak of its proponents simply as temporalists. With these abbreviations in hand, let us consider the benefits.

Benefit the First: Biblical Theology

The temporalist claims that this understanding of God fits with the biblical portrayal of the God-world relation better than divine timelessness. This is because the Bible does not contain any hint of a timeless God.¹⁴ It does portray a God who exists without beginning and without end (e.g. Ps. 90), but it does not say that God exists without succession or moments in His life.¹⁵ Some Christian atemporalists have been aware of this fact, and have

¹¹ Richard Swinburne, ‘God and Time’, (Stump 1993, 208-9). Also, (Lucas 1973, 311).

¹² Dean Zimmerman, ‘God Inside Time and Before Creation’, in (Ganssle and Woodruff 2002, 82-4).

¹³ Swinburne, “God and Time,” in (Stump 1993, 221). For more details, see my (2016, chapter 2).

¹⁴ (Barr 1962). (Blocher 2001). (Feinberg 2001, 255-276). (Jackelen 2005, chapter 2). G.E. Ladd, “Age, Ages,” in (Elwell 1984). (Peters, Eschatology: Eternal Now or Cosmic Future? 2001).

¹⁵ Some might wonder about the immutability passages in scripture. Do they lend support to divine timelessness? Most biblical commentators say no. I address this in (Mullins Forthcoming).

offered different explanations as to why the Bible does not contain the ‘without succession’ concept.¹⁶ For instance, the 17th Century theologian Stephen Charnocke says that God is timeless and so without succession, but that because of the weakness of our concepts the Holy Spirit describes eternity in the Bible simply as without beginning and without end.¹⁷ Whether or not this is a good explanation, I shall leave to the reader. My main concern here is that eternity in the Bible is captured in deeply temporal terms.¹⁸ As Ted Peters explains,

The biblical words that come into English as eternity refer to an age that lasts a long time, perhaps forever. Isaiah uses the Hebrew word *olam* when writing, ‘I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age’ (Isaiah 60:15 NRSV). In the New Testament the principal term for eternity is *aion*, which comes into English also as *aeon*, meaning literally an age that lasts for a long time. This is the term used in John 3:16: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (*zoen aionion*).’¹⁹

The New Testament scholar George Ladd puts the matter succinctly. “Biblically, eternity is unending time.”²⁰ Again, the concept of timelessness simply does not appear in the Bible, and the temporalist can say that her view fits the biblical picture. The defender of divine timelessness must find ways to explain away these passages that describe eternity in temporal terms, whereas the temporalist can happily embrace these biblical texts.

The temporalist can further say that her account fits well with the major biblical theme of God existing alone before creation. Psalm 90:2 says, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” The from/to formula in this passage is a common formula in scripture used to denote a span of time. In this instance, the Hebrew word *olam* is used twice here to refer to the span of God’s life.²¹ It quite literally means from perpetual duration in the indefinite past to perpetual duration in the indefinite future. This is a deeply temporal portrayal of God to say the least. Psalm 90 not only portrays God in temporal terms, it also speaks of God existing alone before creation. One would be hard pressed to say that this is not a temporal before since the language employed is explicitly temporal. As Gershom Brin points out, “The earliest time mentioned [in scripture] is that of the reality prior to the Creation.”²²

¹⁶ See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 10.3.2. Also, (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998, 234-8). (Berkhof 1984, 60). Berkhof notes that Scripture teaches that God’s eternity is duration throughout endless ages, but comments that this is merely a popular way of speaking. Scripture, he says, does not give us the strict philosophical sense of eternity (i.e. without succession), though he suggests that 2 Peter 3:8 might allude to it.

¹⁷ (Charnocke 1682, 181 and 186). John Tillotson, a contemporary of Charnocke’s, disagrees. For him timelessness is inconsistent with a God who is coexistent with succession. We should instead stick with the plain meaning of the text when it says that God exists without beginning and without end. We need to believe what the Bible says, and not the ‘unintelligible notions of the schoolmen.’ (Tillotson 1700, 359-68).

¹⁸ (Jackelen 2005, 75).

¹⁹ (Peters 2001, 352).

²⁰ G.E. Ladd, ‘Age, Ages’ in (Elwell 1984, 21).

²¹ (Brin 2001, 95-103).

²² (Brin 2001, 179). (Waltke and Fredricks 2001, 58).

The idea that God existed before creation is an important biblical theme that looks strikingly like the temporalist account articulated above.²³ It will also play a pivotal role in the temporalist articulation of the Trinity, as discussed below. Of course, it should be noted that the Bible does not describe in detail what the conditions are of this pre-creation time. Further, the Bible does not contain a metaphysical theory of time. As such, the divine temporalist cannot say that her account is the biblical view. She can argue, however, that her view makes sense of this particular biblical theme in ways that divine timelessness cannot. As noted before, the atemporalist will have to find ways to explain away these biblical passages, whilst the divine temporalist can happily embrace them. Consider the following.

An atemporalist will have to say that the ‘before creation’ passages should be taken as a non-temporal before. The atemporalist already does this with passages that describe God as foreknowing and predestining. The atemporalist says that God does not literally foreknow or literally predestine since these denote temporality in the life of God. God is not involved in a before and after relation with His temporal creation. So she will say that the same is true in the case of ‘before creation’. Those passages, she says, need not be taken as a literal before. However, Henri Blocher cautions against this atemporalist move because there is nothing within the Bible itself to warrant this interpretation. “In the absence of any distinct encouragement in Scripture itself, it requires a bold move, it involves a perilous step, if one deprives biblical phrases such as ‘predestination’ or ‘before the world began’ of most, if not all, of their meaning.”²⁴ The temporalist can complain that the atemporalist is on shaky hermeneutical ground in making this move since the Bible does not clearly teach divine timelessness anywhere.

It should be noted, however, that classical theists affirmed that there is a state of affairs where God existed alone without creation.²⁵ It is not as if classical theists never read the Bible. The contention of the temporalist is not, or ought not to be, that classical theism does not affirm these things. Instead, the temporalist argues that it is not a metaphysical possibility for a timeless God to exist alone without creation, then create a universe, and causally sustain it.²⁶ It is metaphysically possible for a temporal God to do such things, and as such the temporalist holds that her view makes better sense of these biblical themes.

Benefit the Second: Incarnational Avoidance of Arianism

The temporalist also holds that her view fits nicely with the Christian doctrine of the incarnation whilst also removing a major motivation for Arianism. God the Son was not always incarnate. The Son freely chose to become incarnate in human flesh at a particular time and dwell among humans. The pre-existence of the Son is a major New Testament theme that was not lost on classical theology.²⁷ As Gregory of Nazianzus points out, God the Son was not always incarnate—was not always connected to a body—but at one point in

²³ Mt 13:35, Mt 24:21, Mt 25:34, Lk 11:50, Jn 17:24, Eph 1:4, 1 Pet 1:20, Tit 1:2, 2 Tim 1:9, Heb 9:6, Jude 25, Ps 90:2, Rev 13:8, and Rev 17:8.

²⁴ (Blocher 2001, 194).

²⁵ Alexander Broadie, ‘Scotistic Metaphysics and Creation Ex Nihilo’, in (Burrell, et al. 2010, 53).

²⁶ (Mullins Forthcoming)

²⁷ (Gathercole 2006).

time He freely became incarnate.²⁸ As I have argued elsewhere, it is not clear how a timeless God can exist without a body, and then exist connected to a body whilst remaining timeless (2016, chapter 7). As T.F. Torrance points out, the incarnation is a new event in the life of God.²⁹ A timeless God cannot have new events in His life, but a temporal God can. The difficulties of a timeless God becoming incarnate are not a challenge on the temporal account.

Divine timelessness caused all sorts of difficulties for the doctrine of the incarnation in the past. Many of the early Christological heresies are the direct result of the conflict between divine timelessness, strong immutability, impassibility, and the incarnation.³⁰ For instance, the Arians would point out that the incarnation involves change, and a timeless God can suffer no change whatsoever. Hence, the Arians argued that the Son was not fully God, but was a created thing instead.³¹ If one holds that God is temporal, this particular motivation for Arianism is taken away. The temporalist holds that God can change in respect to non-essential properties and that God is passible. There is nothing incoherent about God assuming a human nature on this account because God can undergo change.

Benefit the Third: Trinitarian Theology

Another benefit of divine temporality is related to the doctrine of the Trinity. This is an important issue because temporalists do not seem to have realized all of the benefits of divine temporality for the Trinity. I shall draw out those benefits in this section. Several of the details of my account of the Trinity will also be of help later when I examine Paul Helm's Trinitarian objection to divine temporality. I shall focus my discussion around an important, though controversial, distinction made within Trinitarian theology.

There has long been a tension within Christian theology to maintain a conceptual distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. The tension continues to exist in contemporary theology to such an extent that some have even proposed that we rid ourselves of the distinction altogether.³² So what is this distinction, and where does the tension lie? Allow me to take each question in turn.

What is this distinction? The immanent Trinity is meant to describe how the divine persons are in and of themselves from all eternity. The economic Trinity is an account of the divine persons as they are made manifest in their relation to creation in the economy of salvation.³³ This conceptual distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity is often taken to be important for capturing our intuitions about the transcendence and sovereignty of the triune God, whilst also satisfying the way God is portrayed in the gospel narrative. A common claim in contemporary Trinitarian theology is that we must satisfy something called Rahner's Rule. This rule says that the concern in Trinitarian theology is to ensure that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. In other words, Trinitarian

²⁸ *Epistle* 101.4-7, 10.

²⁹ (Torrance 1996, 238).

³⁰ (Hart 2002) See also, Tertullian in (Norris 1980, 66).

³¹ See the 'Deposition of Arius' in (Schaff and Wace 1997, Volume 4, 271ff).

³² In his presentation at the 2014 LA Theology Conference, Fred Sanders proposed that the immanent and economic Trinity distinction is unhelpful, and that perhaps theologians could do without it. I think the distinction is only unhelpful when other areas of our theological system are in disarray.

³³ (Peters 1993, 20-4.)

theology wants to maintain that the same God who exists eternally in Himself as three persons is the same God who works in history to redeem creation.³⁴

At face value, this distinction might seem straightforward. However, I mentioned that there is a perceived tension in Trinitarian theology surrounding this distinction. What exactly is this perceived tension? Problems often arise when theologians try to develop a model of the God-world relationship that adequately satisfies this distinction. Unfortunately, the details of such accounts can often be confusing and complex. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into all of the details. However, I can report what the perceived tensions are that emerge from these discussions since this will be relevant to the topic of this paper. There is a constant struggle in Christian theology to maintain this immanent and economic distinction without collapsing one into the other with undesirable metaphysical consequences. For instance, if God is timeless there is the common worry that the economic Trinity is not truly God—there is a God behind this economic God. On the other hand, there is the much discussed worry that if God is temporal, the immanent and economic Trinity will be collapsed in a way such that God somehow becomes dependent upon creation, and thus He is not *a se* nor essentially triune (i.e. God only exists in relation to creation, and God is only triune in relation to creation).³⁵

Trinitarian theology wishes to affirm Rahner's Rule without falling into the pitfalls noted above. Those pitfalls can be restated as follows. First, if God is temporal, there is a worry that God is dependent upon creation for His existence and triune nature. Second, if God is timeless, there is a worry that we have two separate Trinities. These pitfalls certainly do occur in contemporary Trinitarian theology, but I believe that a proper account of divine temporality can easily avoid these whilst making the immanent and economic distinction intelligible.

Consider the first pitfall. On divine temporalism, God is not dependent upon creation for His existence or His triune nature. Recall from above that the temporalist holds that time exists because God exists, and that God once existed without creation. The temporalist holds that God existed temporally prior to creation in a temporal vacuum—an unmetricated state of affairs without any intrinsic change. In this state the divine persons existed alone from everlasting. On this account, the immanent Trinity is a description of the essential (i.e. necessary and sufficient) properties for being divine that are displayed during this time and forever after. Some will hold that the essential properties for being divine are properties that no being can fail to have and still be considered divine. Others will state this in a stronger way by saying that God cannot continue to exist if He were to lose an essential property. Whichever way one goes with this will depend on one's overall metaphysics.

The immanent Trinity is also a description of the eternal relations that obtain between the divine persons of the Trinity. Each divine person eternally has all of the essential properties for being divine, and each divine person necessarily stands in a perichoretic relation to each other divine person. It is part of the essence of each divine

³⁴ [Stoeger 1990, 374-6]. Peter C. Phan, 'Mystery of Grace and Salvation: Karl Rahner's Theology of the Trinity', in (Phan 2011, 197-8).

³⁵ Bruce D. Marshall, 'The Dereliction of Christ and the Impassibility of God', in (Keating and White 2009, 293-8).

person to relate to one another. Necessarily, no divine person can exist separated from any of the other divine persons. The divine persons are, necessarily, strongly internally related to one another such that they cannot exist apart from each other. Thinkers like Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor, and Keith Yandell maintain that this inseparability is what distinguishes the Trinity from tritheism.³⁶ John Duns Scotus argues that this type of inseparability is what allows for the divine persons to be the same being without being identical to each other.³⁷

The immanent Trinity also notes that each divine person is, necessarily, distinguished by several personal features. Some of the personal distinctions that I note here are not held by all Trinitarians, but I maintain that these distinctions are needed to differentiate the divine persons. First, each person is a center of consciousness with a robust first-person perspective. This entails that each divine person has her own *de se* beliefs. *De se* beliefs are beliefs that are unique to individual persons. In the case of the Trinity, only the Father can have the belief, 'I am the Father', and only the Son can have the belief, 'I am the Son'. This also entails the Scotistic and Damascene concept that each divine person has a unique notional or personal property.³⁸ Notional or personal properties are incommunicable properties that pick out unique individual persons. For instance, only the Son has the notional property being the Son. The notional property being the Son is incommunicable whereas a kind-essential property like omnipotence is communicable and shared by all of the divine persons. One way to state this is that each divine person shares in the communicable divine essence, but each divine person enjoys a unique incommunicable notional property. Another way to state this is that kind-essences are communicable, whereas persons are not.

Second, each divine person is immanently distinguished by having her own unique will. This is important to note, as other models of the Trinity lack this feature. It is necessary to say that each divine person has her own unique will, otherwise we have little resource to say that only the Son becomes incarnate, or that only the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh. If the Father, Son, and Spirit share numerically one will, it is difficult to maintain that the Father and Spirit do not become incarnate along with the Son since the actions of the Son are numerically identical to the actions of the Father and the Spirit. So, each divine person must have her own unique will.

Two things are important to note at this point. First, the incarnation and the pouring out of the Spirit are economic activities. However, in order for these economic activities to obtain, it must be the case that each divine person immanently has a unique will. The distinct immanent wills of the divine persons is a necessary condition for the obtaining of distinct economic actions by the divine persons. Second, the divine persons having distinct immanent wills is compatible with the traditional claim that the external works of the Trinity are undivided. This is because the divine persons can be united in an undivided

³⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations*, 5.4. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Chapters on Love*,

2.29. Cf. Keith Yandell, "How Many Times Does Three Go into One?" in (McCall and Rea 2009, 168).

³⁷ Richard Cross, 'Philosophy and the Trinity', in (Marenbon 2012, 713-722). It is a type of sameness without identity that is different from the material constitution accounts of the Trinity on offer today.

³⁸ John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures*, 1.14-45. John of Damascus makes a similar suggestion in *Orthodox Faith*, I.8.

ultimate purpose whilst each performing unique acts that contribute to the completion of the ultimate purpose.³⁹

With these considerations in mind, we can move on to the economic Trinity and see that divine temporalism avoids the other pitfall—the worry that we have two separate Trinities. On divine temporalism, the economic Trinity expresses the contingent and accidental properties, and roles that the divine persons freely take on in the work of creation and salvation. This is important to note because, on classical theism, God cannot have any accidental properties.⁴⁰ The temporal God, however, can have accidental properties. On divine temporalism, the divine persons do not cease to have the essential properties for being divine when they take on the work of creation and salvation. Since the triune God is an enduring being who persists through time by existing as a whole, we have one numerically identical being throughout and not two. The same triune God who existed eternally prior to creation is the same triune God who freely created the universe and took on the contingent property Creator. As history unfolds only one of the divine persons becomes incarnate. The incarnation is not necessary and essential for distinguishing God the Son from the Father and Holy Spirit since the incarnation is accidental to the Son. What is necessary and essential for distinguishing the divine persons is the fact that there are three centers of consciousness, each with robust first-person perspectives, each with unique *de se* beliefs, each with unique notional properties, and each with unique wills. As such, no contingent or accidental property is needed to distinguish the divine persons. The contingent and accidental properties are a necessary consequence of God's free act to create a universe and relate to it.

As great as some Christian philosophers and theologians hold divine temporality to be these days, it is not as if the view is without objections. In the remainder of this paper I shall examine, and refute, an argument against divine temporality offered by Paul Helm.⁴¹ I will call this the Arian Charge.

The Arian Charge: The Creedal Background

The Arian Charge is quite serious for Christians. A central element of orthodox Christian thought is that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all *homoousios*—of the same essence. Further, only the Son became incarnate in human flesh. The incarnate Son is held to be both fully divine and fully human. The Arian controversy in the 3rd and 4th centuries called all of this into question. (Or perhaps I should say forced Christians to clarify their beliefs.) As briefly mentioned above, the Arians held that God the Son was created. Since the Son is a creature He is not *homoousios* with the Father. A popular Arian slogan is that “there was a time when the Son was not.” Other forms of Arianism do not rest upon this slogan, but are in full agreement that the Son and Father are not *homoousios*.

³⁹ (Hasker 2013, 205-210).

⁴⁰ Augustine, *The Trinity* V.17. Boethius, *The Trinity Is One God Not Three Gods* IV. Peter Lombard, *Sentences* Book I, Dist. VIII.3 and Dist. XXX.1. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.12. James Arminius, *Disputation* IV.XIV.

⁴¹ (Helm, *Eternal Creation* 1994).

because the Son is a created being.⁴² On Arianism, the Son is highly exalted, the firstborn of creation, but is a lesser divine being due to being created by the Father. Orthodox Christians saw this as soteriologically detrimental to the faith since it entailed that the incarnate Son was not fully human and fully divine. The orthodox also saw this as a denial of the Trinity. The early Church fathers engaged in fierce debates with Arians over various issues related to biblical interpretation and philosophical theology.⁴³ These debates eventually led to the development of the Nicene Creed in 325 and the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381.

One relevant development in these creeds for our discussion is the doctrine of eternal generation. The Nicene Creed states that the Son was begotten of the Father and not made. It affirms that the Son is of the same essence of the Father. It denies that the Son is a created thing and denies that there was a time when the Son did not exist. The Creed makes a distinction between 'begotten' on the one hand, and 'made' or 'created' on the other. Whether or not this is a legitimate distinction will be discussed below. The idea in the Creed is that if the Son is begotten of the Father, He can be of the same essence as the Father. If the Son is made or created, He cannot be of the same essence as the Father. The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed adds that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The idea here is that 'proceeds', like 'begotten', does not mean 'made' or 'created'. It is intended to be an affirmation that the Spirit is of the same essence as the Father and Son.⁴⁴

It should be noted that the concepts at play in the early Trinitarian debates are causal, not metaphorical. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa in *On Not Three Gods* states that, "the principle of causality distinguishes, then, the Persons of the holy Trinity. It affirms that the one is uncaused, while the other depends on the cause." Terms like 'begotten' and 'made' are both causal, but there is a slight difference that quickly became obscured in these early debates due, in part, to the similar spelling in the Greek. As the historian Alasdair I. C. Heron explains, the term 'begotten' (Greek: *gennetos*) in the Nicene Creed was intended to denote 'that which has a cause or source outside itself.' This causal source could be a something, or in the case of the Trinity, someone. This need not involve the begotten thing coming into existence. The term 'created' or 'made' (Greek: *genetos*), however, was intended to denote 'that which has come into being.'⁴⁵ So the creedal teaching affirms that the Son is caused to exist by the Father, but in such a way that the Son never came into being. In contrast, the Father alone is unbegotten/uncaused (Greek: *agenetos/agennetos*), and is the source and cause of the Trinity.⁴⁶

Some readers might be skeptical as to whether or not this causal concept is really in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed or Nicene Creed of 381. Some might object and say that 'the causal concept is clearly found in certain Greek theologians, but surely it cannot be in the creed.' This, I reply, ignores the historical context of the Creed. As Christopher Beeley points out, the Nicene Creed that is developed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 bears a close resemblance to the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus. This is understandable since

⁴² (Gavrilyuk 2004, 117). Rebecca Lyman, 'A Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism', in (Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, 1993).

⁴³ Sara Parvis, 'Christology in the Early Arian Controversy: The Exegetical War', in (Lincoln and Paddison 2008).

⁴⁴ (Giles 2012, chapters 4-7).

⁴⁵ Alasdair I. C. Heron, 'Homousios with the Father', in (Torrance 1981, 60-1).

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations* 3.3.

Gregory was the presiding president of the Council.⁴⁷ In Gregory's Trinitarian theology, the Father alone is the unoriginated or uncaused being. The Father timelessly causes the Son to exist such that the Son is also timeless. Even though the Son is caused to exist, the Son does not begin to exist because the Son is begotten and not created or made. Since the Son is eternally begotten, the Son is co-eternal with the Father.⁴⁸ Gregory's theology here is deeply traditional, and goes back at least to the Alexandrian traditions of Origen and Eusebius. This is the understanding of 'eternally begotten' that is agreed upon by the Council of Constantinople, and written into the Nicene Creed. According to the historian Steven R. Holmes, the claim is that 'the Father is the personal cause of the Son,' and because of this 'they share the same nature.'⁴⁹

What is further worthy of note is that this causal concept was at play in the East and West in both the early and medieval Church.⁵⁰ Current patristic scholarship points out that there is no fundamental difference between the East and the West over the doctrine of the Trinity, except with regards to the filioque controversy.⁵¹ This is a later debate over whether or not the Father alone causes the Holy Spirit to exist, or if the Father and the Son together cause the Holy Spirit to exist. According to Holmes, what all sides agree upon during the patristic era is that "within the divine life, the Father is the sole cause, begetting the Son and spirating the Spirit."⁵² The concern of the patristics is that without this causal sequence from the Father, there would be three first principles, or three Gods.⁵³ The Father alone is the first principle. As Lewis Ayres explains, the Father is "the cause and source of the Trinitarian communion."⁵⁴ Somehow the Father's volitional activity to bring about the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit is such that the Son and Holy Spirit perfectly share in the divine nature. Somehow the Father's causal activity guarantees the full divinity of the Son and Spirit, as well as the unity of the three such that there is one God and not three gods.

The Arian Charge: Helm's Argument

To restate the matter, this distinction between 'begotten' and 'made' within the Creed was intended to avoid Arianism. For the early Arians, there was a time when the Son was not. The Son came into existence. Hence, the Son was made or created. The Creed proclaims that the Son is caused to exist, but in such a way that the Son never began to exist. The Son is begotten, and thus co-eternal with the Father. With this in mind we can delve into Helm's argument.

⁴⁷ (Beeley 2012, 195-96).

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations* 3.3.

⁴⁹ (Holmes 2012, 113).

⁵⁰ This causal concept was at play in the East and West in both the early and medieval Church. See Richard Cross, 'Latin Trinitarianism: Some Conceptual and Historical Considerations', in (McCall and Rea 2009). Michel R. Barnes, 'The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language', (Barnes and Williams 1993) (Fox 2006, 56). It should be noted that Aquinas denies 'causation' and prefers to say that the Father is the 'principle' of the Son. The denial of causation seems to me to be little more than a word play because he still affirms that the Son is derived from the productive activity of the Father. See (Paasch 2012).

⁵¹ (Holmes 2012, 129-31, and 146).

⁵² (Holmes 2012 146-47).

⁵³ (Beeley 2012, 110). Cf. (Ayres 2010, 264-65).

⁵⁴ (Ayres 2010, 264).

Helm claims that it is difficult to see how a temporalist account of God can handle the doctrine of the eternal generation of God the Son as stated in the Nicene Creed. He thinks that the temporalist view entails that there was a time when God the Son did not exist. He writes that “what this temporalist view requires is that there was a time in God the Father’s biography, whether that time was metricated or not, when the Son had yet to be begotten.”⁵⁵ A bit of background is needed to understand Helm’s argument. Divine temporalists of the Oxford school typically hold that, necessarily, all causes must be temporally prior to their effects. One of the main arguments against divine timelessness is that the notion of atemporal causation—a timeless cause that is not temporally prior to its effects—is incoherent.⁵⁶ The idea in Helm’s critique is that, on temporalism, the Father cannot generate the Son without being temporally prior to the Son. If this is true, the heresy of Arianism is not far off.

Helm’s ideas on this topic develop over time as I shall discuss below.⁵⁷ For now I wish to focus on, what I take to be, the strongest version of Helm’s argument. In the earliest version of the argument he seems to propose some sort of dilemma for the temporalist: either adopt Arianism or abandon the notion that causes are necessarily temporally prior to their effects.⁵⁸

According to Helm, the temporalist’s causal principle seems to entail Arianism. Say that all causes are temporally prior to their effects, as the temporalist affirms. The Father causes the Son to exist. So the Father will be temporally prior to the Son. If the Father is temporally prior to the Son that would mean that there is a time when the Father exists without the Son.⁵⁹ That is exactly what Arius taught as is summed up in the early Arian slogan, “There was a time when the Son was not.” So it would seem that the temporalist’s causal principle leads to Arianism. The Christian temporalist will naturally wish to avoid Arianism, so she must do something in response to this problem. In Helm’s earlier writings, he pushes the temporalist to abandon the causal principle that led to Arianism in the first place. The rub is that the temporalist will face a different problem if she abandons her causal principle in order to avoid Arianism.

If the defender of divine temporalism rejects Arianism, she must say that the Father can cause the Son without being temporally prior to the Son. In other words, the temporalist would have to give up her causal principle. According to Helm, it would appear that the Oxford school would then have to allow that the Son is eternally/timelessly generated. In abandoning her understanding of causation, the temporalist would be admitting that it is logically possible for a timeless action to occur: an action where the cause is not temporally prior to the effect. If this is logically possible, then there seems to be no reason why God could not timelessly create the world, timelessly sustain the universe, or timelessly become incarnate. So the defender of divine temporality would be abandoning one of the biggest objections she has to divine timelessness—the impossibility of atemporal causes with temporal effects.

⁵⁵ (Helm 1994, 336).

⁵⁶ (Swinburne 1994, 139-40).

⁵⁷ Helm, ‘Time and Trinity’, in (Poidevin 1998). Helm, ‘Is God Bound by Time?’ in (Huffman and Johnson 2002). (Helm 2010).

⁵⁹ (Helm 2010, 283).

In the end, Helm's dilemma is an attempt to force the temporalist to either adopt Arianism or adopt divine timelessness. If the temporalist wishes to use her causal principle to reject divine timelessness, she must accept Arianism. If the temporalist rejects her causal principle to avoid Arianism, she now has no reason to reject divine timelessness. In the earlier versions of Helm's argument, there is an assumption that adopting divine timelessness is the way to avoid Arianism. However, Helm never makes it clear how this helps avoid Arianism. (More on the below.)

Helm's strategy is very clever, but there are at least two issues that prevent his argument from going through. First, the charge of Arianism can be turned around on the defender of divine timelessness. Divine timelessness alone does not save one from Arianism. Second, the doctrine of eternal generation is biblically unwarranted. The temporalist can keep her causal principle, and avoid Arianism, by denying the doctrine of eternal generation on biblical grounds. So Helm has failed to push the temporalist back towards timelessness because there are other options for the divine temporalist to take in order to avoid Arianism. I will take each issue in turn.

There is More Than One Way to Be an Arian

Those familiar with the history of Arianism will be aware that there is more than one way to be an Arian, and this is true in the contemporary discussions as well. Helm's claim is that if God is temporal and the doctrine of eternal generation is true, it is clear that there is a time when God the Father exists without God the Son. Thus, one should return to the loving arms of the timeless God who acts atemporally. What is interesting is that the Arians believed that the generation of the Son took place "before times and before ages." The Son was "begotten timelessly by the Father and created before ages."⁶⁰ Somehow the Son is everlasting yet created, everlasting yet not co-eternal with the Father.⁶¹ This may sound confusing, and this is most likely due to the fact that 'Arianism' is a coarse-grained label applied to a diverse group of thinkers and movements that are not obviously united on certain issues.⁶² Also, there is some evidence to suggest that Alexander and Athanasius made up certain claims as part of their smear campaign against Arius.⁶³ What is important for our discussion, however, is that divine timelessness does not automatically save one from Arianism. One could believe that God is atemporal and that all of His actions are done in one timeless act, but this would not be sufficient to deliver one from Arianism because that is exactly what the Arians believed. As noted above, one of the motivations for Arianism, and the other heretical movements that deny homoousios, is a commitment to divine timelessness.

In Helm's recent writings he makes a similar point. If eternal generation is understood as a causal notion, as it is in the creeds, it raises conceptual difficulties for everyone.⁶⁴ In other words, if eternal generation is understood causally, the Arian charge can be turned around on the defender of atemporality. This is important to note since it

⁶⁰ 'The Confession of the Arians, Addressed to Alexander of Alexandria', in (Hardy 1954, 333).

⁶¹ (Paasch 2010, 389-90). (Meijering 1974). (Hall 2002, 36-7).

⁶² Rebecca Lyman, "A Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism," (Barnes and Williams 1993).

⁶³ (Beeley 2012, 110ff).

⁶⁴ (Helm 2010, 284-5). Also, (Helm, 2001).

shows one of the weaknesses in Helm's earlier version of the argument. It brings out the failure of the early Church fathers to refute Arianism in full.

One of the standard Cappadocian replies to the late Arian, Eunomius, was that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist such that the Son is also timeless.⁶⁵ Eunomius refused to accept that this reply refuted his objection.⁶⁶ According to Eunomius, if God the Father atemporally generates the Son and spirates the Holy Spirit, the Son and Spirit will be contingent beings because their existence has a cause. Eunomius agrees with the Cappadocians that the existence of the Son and Spirit depend upon the volitional, atemporal action of God the Father, and not some involuntary overflow of the divine nature.⁶⁷ What Eunomius points out, *pace* orthodoxy, is that this entails that the Son and the Spirit will exist contingently because their existence is derived from the Father's free act. The Father is an uncaused, necessary being, but the Son and Spirit are caused and contingent beings. Arianism will be close at hand for the Son and Spirit are not of the same essence of the Father.

One might reject this argument by saying that the eternal generation of the Son and spiration of the Spirit are necessary actions of the Father. Thus, the Son and Spirit are not contingent. If this rejoinder is successful, it still does not prevent Arianism for the Son and the Spirit have different non-personal essential properties that the Father lacks—i.e. aseity. Aseity is widely held to be an essential property of divinity. No being that exists *a se* has a cause for its existence. Its existence is in no way derived from anything else. So any being that has a cause for its existence is of a different essence than any being who is not caused to exist. The Arian Asterius the Sophist argues this point as follows: "But the one who was begotten by him, who is the image of the invisible God, is other. For one is ingenerate, the other generate...to be ingenerate is to be that which is not made, but eternal; to be ingenerate is not to have a cause of being, but also to be oneself to the generate the cause of their coming into being."⁶⁸ The argument can be reformulated as follows. The essence of the Father is to not have a cause—the Father exists *a se*. The essence of the Son and Holy Spirit is to have a cause, so they do not exist *a se*. The Father exists *a se*, but the Son and Spirit do not. So the Father is not of the same essence as the Son and Holy Spirit.

How is this to be resolved?⁶⁹ Affirming divine timelessness does not resolve the issue, so the intent of Helm's dilemma fails. Affirming the distinction between 'begotten' and 'made' also fails to help since the late Arian arguments focus on the fact that 'begotten' is a causal relation between the Father and the Son. They do not focus on the 'there was a time when the Son did not exist' slogan. So where should the Christian go from here?

The Way Forward: Rejecting Eternal Generation on Biblical Grounds

⁶⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.9. For a full discussion see (Giles 2012, chapter 5).

⁶⁶ (Vaggione 1987, 59 and 183).

⁶⁷ (Holmes 2012, 112).

⁶⁸ As quoted in Parvis, "Christology in the Early Arian Controversy," in (Lincoln and Paddison 2008, 127).

⁶⁹ I should note that the Calvinist response to this question is incoherent. A Calvinist will say that the Father gives or grants aseity to the Son and Spirit. This is incoherent. Aseity, by its very definition, cannot be given to another. No being who exists *a se* has its existence derived from another.

In later writings, Helm mentions a possible solution to the Arian problem. One could simply deny the doctrine of eternal generation and hold that the three divine persons of the Trinity are all co-eternally existent. This is not a position that Helm clearly endorses. He simply admits that he is puzzled as to why Christians cannot simply affirm the economic sending of the Son, and deny the doctrine of eternal generation. He writes, “Is the language of begottenness and procession not a reading back into the doctrine of the Trinity those roles which according to the New Testament each person of the Trinity adopts in order to ensure human salvation?”⁷⁰

What Helm does not note is that the temporalist could deny the doctrine of eternal generation as well in order to avoid Arianism. Thus showing that Helm has failed to push the temporalist back towards timelessness because the temporalist has other options open to her. The causal principle that the temporalist holds does seem to clearly entail Arianism when combined with the doctrine of eternal generation, but the temporalist need not abandon her causal principle in order to avoid Arianism. The problem for the temporalist is the conjunction of the causal principle with the traditional causal relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As argued in the previous section, the causal relations between the divine persons seems to be a problem for everyone. So the obvious solution for avoiding Arianism would seem to be abandoning the causal relations between the divine persons.

In order to avoid Arianism, the temporalist can say that the Father does not cause the Son and Spirit to exist. She could simply say that, necessarily, all three of the divine persons have always existed and all three will always exist in a perichoretic relation. She could rejoice with Anselm and say that the “Father, Son, and Spirit exist in each other, and with such equality that none is greater than the others. What a joy it is to behold this!”⁷¹ This suggestion may seem shocking for some. One can already imagine the raised eyebrows and hear the sound of monocles falling into champagne glasses. It certainly goes against the letter of the Nicene Creed, but the temporalist can argue that it is not contrary to the spirit of the Creed and is fully compatible with Scripture.

In fact, a growing number of evangelical theologians and philosophers reject the doctrine of eternal generation on biblical grounds alone.⁷² The temporalist John Feinberg argues that the doctrine of eternal generation is not something found in the Bible. Unlike the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of eternal generation does not have any significant biblical support.⁷³ The doctrine of eternal generation is a statement about the immanent

⁷⁰ (Helm 2010, 286).

⁷¹ Anselm, *Monologion*, 59.

⁷² For a full list of such evangelicals see (Giles 2012, 30-33).

⁷³ (Feinberg 2001, 489-92). For a defense of eternal generation see (Dahms 1989). There is a weakness in Dahms’s argument that plagues many such defenses. It assumes that any mention of the Son being born implies the doctrine of eternal generation. The doctrine of eternal generation was first articulated by Origen and was developed over time. It is dubious to take such metaphysical doctrines and read them back into the Bible. One can argue that they make sense of, or cohere with, the biblical claims, but that is not the same as the Bible explicitly endorsing a doctrine. Dahms’s paper, like so many others, merely assumes that the doctrine, as later developed in the Church, is laying on the surface of the biblical text. Another weakness in Dahms’s paper is his endorsement of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. He argues that we need eternal generation in order to establish the eternal subordination of the Son. This, however, is a problem because the eternal subordination of the Son logically entails that the Son is not of the same essence as the Father. See (McCall 2010, chapter 6).

Trinity and not the economic Trinity. Traditionally theologians distinguish between the eternal generation of the Son (immanent Trinity) and the temporal sending of the Son (economic Trinity). Traditional theologians have interpreted various passages to refer to the immanent Trinity in order to establish the doctrine of eternal generation. The problem is that the passages they refer to are often statements about the economic Trinity. For instance, passages in the gospel of John about the Father ‘sending’ the Son are often invoked to support the eternal generation of the Son. Such passages, however, are about the economy of salvation. The very notion of ‘sending’ in John’s gospel is ambassadorial language that implies a temporary mission whereby the one sent is given the authority to represent the sender. The one sent is expected to return to the sender at the end of the mission. This does not, in anyway, imply some sort of atemporal causal relation between the sender and the one sent such that the one sent is also atemporal. This should be clear from the fact that Jesus, at the last supper, refers to Himself as the apostle (the sent one), and then makes all of His disciples apostles as well.⁷⁴ The usage implies a temporal mission, not a timeless cause with a timeless effect.

I cannot offer an exhaustive treatment of the biblical data, but I can note two sets of passages that are typically taken to support the doctrine of eternal generation. For instance, there are passages that speak of the Son’s exalted status as the Messiah (e.g. Acts 13:32-33; Heb. 1:5; Heb. 5:4-6). The Acts passage is in reference to the Father declaring that the Son is the Messiah by resurrecting the Son. The statement “today I have begotten you” is about the resurrection of the Son, and so it does not teach eternal generation. The Hebrews 1 passage can be taken as statements about the eternal exalted status of the Son, but the emphasis here is that Christ is God’s Son and the Messiah. The phrase “You are my Son, today I have begotten you” is used to establish that Jesus is superior to the angels. However, verse 4 states that this is a status that Jesus took on, or became, as the Messiah. It is not a status that the Son had from all eternity. The ‘begotten’ is about Jesus as Messiah, and not about Jesus’ divine essence. Hebrews 1 does teach that Jesus is divine, but the ‘begotten’ claim is about His messiahship, and that is an economic claim. It does not give us the doctrine of eternal generation either. Hebrews 5 makes a similar claim.⁷⁵ In this passage the “today I have begotten you” is in reference to Jesus becoming the high priest between God and man. Jesus was not always the high priest. It is not a role that the Son eternally enjoyed. It is a role that the Son took on in the economy of salvation. So this is an economic statement, and not a statement about the immanent Trinity.

The other main passages that have traditionally been used to support the doctrine of eternal generation are passages that contain the Greek term *monogenes*, which is used all throughout the gospel of John and 1 John. This is typically translated as ‘only begotten’ in our English bibles, but in the past it was often held to contain the concept of generation—‘begotten’ could mean ‘generated’. However, Feinberg, like most New Testament scholars today, notes that this term does not contain the concept of eternal generation. The term has the meaning of ‘one of a kind’ or ‘unique.’⁷⁶ For instance, the term *monogenes* is used in Hebrews 11:17 to refer to Abraham’s son Isaac. Was Isaac Abraham’s only son? No. Abraham also had a son named Ishmael. Was Isaac unique? Yes. Isaac was one of a kind in

⁷⁴ (Witherington 1995, 140-143).

⁷⁵ (Giles 2012, 65).

⁷⁶ (Feinberg 2001, 490-1). Cf. (Giles 2012, 64-6).

that there were certain promises associated with his birth that did not come with the birth of Ishmael. Is there some obscure metaphysical relationship between Abraham and Isaac taught in this passage? No. The meaning is quite clear: Isaac is unique. The same is true of the Son of God incarnate. The incarnation is one of a kind. God has not done anything like it before. The gospel of John continually makes grand claims about the Son that certainly warrant it being labeled as unique. None of this, however, clearly teaches some ineffable, timeless, asymmetrical causal relation between the Father and the Son.

To further put to rest the doctrine of eternal generation, it should be recalled from above that the Bible does not contain the concept of divine timelessness. So it cannot explicitly teach a timeless asymmetrical causal relation between the Father and the Son. We can put the matter into the form of a slogan: “No timeless existence in the Bible, no timeless generation in the Bible.” There are also no biblical statements that the Father is the source or fountain of divinity. These are phrases typically used to expound upon the doctrine of eternal generation. We can find such statements in thinkers like the Cappadocians, Pseudo-Dionysius, John of Damascus, and Thomas Aquinas, but we cannot find such statements in the Bible. There is no need to posit anything like a doctrine of eternal generation in order to remain biblical because the Bible simply does not teach it.⁷⁷ Thus, there is no difficulty for the divine temporalist from the doctrine of eternal generation and her causal principle because she can easily dispense with eternal generation and remain biblical.

Don't We Need the Eternal Generation and Procession to Distinguish the Divine Persons? No.

The Christian tradition has spilt a great amount of ink trying to avoid the Arian conclusion. It was obviously seen as a serious threat given the amount of attention it received. It seems to me that it is much easier to abandon the doctrine of eternal generation in order to avoid Arianism. But one might wonder if abandoning it leaves one with an impoverished view of the Trinity. The eternal generation of the Son and spiration of the Spirit have long been held to distinguish the divine persons in the immanent Trinity, but there is no need for this. We do not need the doctrine of eternal generation and spiration to distinguish the divine persons, as Helm himself makes clear. “The Trinity without the relations of eternal begetting and eternal procession would nevertheless remain a Trinity.”⁷⁸ It is the case that all members of the Godhead are *a se* and eternally coexist in a perichoretic relation. It is also the case that we have three distinct divine persons. We do not need the doctrine of eternal generation and spiration to distinguish them.

As discussed above, the temporalist has various ways to distinguish the divine persons. One could say that the three centers of consciousness are necessary and sufficient to distinguish the persons. Each center of consciousness would have its own robust first-person perspective, corresponding *de se* beliefs, and free will. Another option is to follow John Duns Scotus and say that each divine person has a notional property that is unique to

⁷⁷ One could grant that the Bible does not teach the doctrine of eternal generation explicitly. (Especially since the Bible contains no concept of timelessness.) However, she could argue that the doctrine is compatible with the Bible. Yet she will still need to explicate eternal generation in a way that avoids Arianism.

⁷⁸ (Helm 2001, 355).

Him. The Father has the notional property of being the Father. This property cannot be communicated to the Son. Likewise, the Son has the notional property of being the Son and this cannot be communicated to either the Father or the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ So, again, the doctrine of eternal generation and spiration are not needed to distinguish the divine persons.

Don't We Need The Eternal Generation and Procession for Divine Unity? No.

The doctrine of eternal generation and procession have also traditionally been appealed to in order to account for the unity among the divine persons. In other words, the doctrine is supposed to explain how there is one God and not three Gods. So one might worry that if the temporalist abandons the doctrine then she will be abandoning monotheism as well. Isn't the temporalist abandoning monotheism, and falling into the arms of tritheism? No, and for two reasons.

First, the doctrine of eternal generation cannot deliver on its claim to divine unity for it cannot establish that the divine persons are of the same essence. As argued above, the causal relations entail Arianism. Allow me to restate one form of the argument again. To be God is to exist *a se*. A being exists *a se* if and only if that being does not have its existence derived from something outside of itself. As Eunomius and the Cappadocians agree, the Father does not have a cause for His existence. The Father is God and exists *a se*. As Eunomius and the Cappadocians agree, the Father causes the Son and Spirit to exist. Here is where the problem arises for the doctrine of eternal generation and procession. If the Son and Spirit have a cause for their existence, they do not exist *a se*. If they do not exist *a se*, they are not God. This is not divine unity. So one cannot appeal to the doctrine of eternal generation to account for divine unity. It simply can do no such thing.

Second, as I articulated above, the temporalist has various resources to account for divine unity. She can say that the divine persons stand in a perichoretic relation. The divine persons are necessarily, strongly internally related to one another such that they cannot exist apart from one another. It is of the essence of each divine person that they relate to one another, so it is metaphysically impossible for them to exist without each other. Again, as noted above, the Cappadocians saw this inseparability of the divine persons to be the key difference between the Trinity and tritheism. The temporalist who rejects the doctrine of eternal generation can appeal to this account of divine unity. Whether or not critics find this to be sufficient to preserve their favored form of monotheism, it at least does not obviously entail a denial of divine unity like the doctrine of eternal generation does.

Concluding Remarks

⁷⁹ One might argue that in the absence of eternal generation *Father* and *Son* lose their meaning. These are economic names and not immanent names. As such, these names cannot be used to distinguish the persons. Fair enough. *Father* and *Son* may not be immanent notional properties. That does not really matter. Each person still has a notional property since each person is a distinct person. It simply is the case that God has not revealed to us what each person's eternal name is. The temporalist can say that it simply follows from the fact that there are three divine persons that there are three notional properties. The temporalist need not know what each person's name is in order to hold this.

I have attempted to offer an articulation and defense of a Trinitarian account of divine temporality. I have examined one objection against divine temporality from Paul Helm and argued that it is not a threat to the divine temporalist. To put it simply, the Arian charge fails on multiple grounds. The defender of divine temporality has more than enough theological resources at hand to maintain a robust Trinitarian theology whilst avoiding Arianism.

The charge of Arianism is not the only objection to divine temporality, but it is a serious objection that has not been dealt with in the literature. By dealing with this objection it seems to me that divine temporality is in a good position to be fruitful for further developments in philosophical theology.⁸⁰

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