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Confessing the Trinitarian Gospel

Charles P. Arand

The renewed interest in the Trinity during the twentieth century resulted in part from the fear that the Trinity had become all but irrelevant to the faith and piety of many Christians. It has been asked, "if one eliminated the Father and the Spirit would it have any impact upon the average person's piety as long as they had Jesus?" Stanley Grenz has suggested that a Jesu-Unitarianism probably characterizes the actual faith of many American evangelicals. This is simply an indication that the doctrine of the Trinity seems isolated from doctrine and life rather than as a way of confessing the very being of God by means of the biblical story of his activity in and with His people. The challenge of trinitarian theology in the twentieth century was to correct that deficiency and once again identify the relevance of the Trinity for theology and piety.

One of the important contributions that the contemporary debate has made to the doctrine of the Trinity lies in its rediscovery of the so-called economic Trinity as a way of recovering the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the structure of salvation history. The charge was leveled that many people had come to think of the Trinity in primarily ontological terms, that is, they conceived of the Trinity in terms of the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit apart from their work within the world. As a result, the Trinity can only viewed as a mystery about which we can say nothing. Dorothy Sayers suggested that the average churchgoer might answer: "The Father is incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the whole thing incomprehensible." This has led to a resurgence of interest in statements about the economic Trinity. But often happens, the pendulum swings too far in the opposite direction. Thus in reaction, we have witnessed the tendency to collapse the ontological Trinity into the economic Trinity as theologians worked out the ramifications of Rahner's rule, "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity."

The Lutheran Confessions never really lost the distinction even though they may not use that terminology. However, we may not have always seen it or appreciated the distinction as such. In particular, the ecumenical creeds move from economic language of the Trinity to ontological language of the Trinity in order to confess that salvation is the work of God Himself. The Reformation confessions move build on the ontological language of the Trinity while retrieving the economic language in order to confess that salvation is not only the work of God Himself, but that it is God's nature to save. Put another way, the heart of God is Gospel. Herein we can make a contribution to the current

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discussion. Namely, the doctrine of the Trinity is not given as a model for human relationships within society or the church. It is revealed in order to show us the depths of love of God for us in Christ Jesus.

The Creedal Contribution: It is God who Saves

When we turn to the Creeds, we will see that they utilize both patterns (economic and immanent) of speaking about Christ within the Trinity. The Apostles' Creed replicates simply and straightforwardly the biblical narrative of the New Testament. The Nicene Creed continues that economic pattern, but its *homoousios* marks the transition from the economic language to ontological language of intra-divine coequal hypostases (GC, 71). The Athanasian Creed completes that transition but takes it in a decidedly western direction.

Apostles' Creed – Nicene Creed

Trinitarian reflection in the New Testament and in the three centuries leading up to Nicea generally considered the Trinity within the framework of the threefold structure (*oikonomia*) of salvation. This means that it focused attention on the way in which the three persons (Father, Son, Spirit) manifested themselves in our world soteriologically (Eph 1:3-14; Gal 4). The economic Trinity has several characteristics. First, discussion began with the three persons and then proceeds to their unity. Second, the words "God" and "Father" are used synonymously. Third, the Father provided the focal point for the unity of the three persons. All things proceed *A Patre ad Patre*. As Gregory of Nazianzus expressed it, "All action which comes upon the Creature from God...begins with the Father and is present through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit." This approach is taken up in both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

The Apostles' Creed speaks of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and focuses on their *opera ad extra*. The three persons are considered within a cosmological (activity within the world) framework rather than an ontological (very nature and being of God) framework. The Father is identified with creation. The Son is identified by his incarnation, death, and resurrection. The Spirit is confessed alongside the church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Hence the Creed has a trinitarian structure (three articles) with a christological extension (the second article is the longest). Within the Creed's framework there is a movement from creation through redemption to the consummation of all things.

While the Apostles' Creed speaks of three persons along with their *opera ad extra*, there is virtually no mention of their ontological unity. In the Apostles' Creed, the word "God" does not refer to an abstract divine essence, but to a concrete person within the narrative. God is simply identified with the Father.

"I believe in God the Father, Almighty." This use of the word G-o-d reflects the dominant usage of the word in the New Testament.¹ The only place where a link is mentioned between the three persons appears in the second article. There it confesses that Jesus Christ is the Father's "only son" and "is conceived by the Spirit." The first phrase identifies Jesus with the Creator over and against gnosticism's separation of the two with its resultant disparagement of the creaturely. The latter confesses the miracle of the incarnation and points toward the redemption of creation.

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

Rooted in a baptismal creed, the Nicene Creed follows the Apostles' Creed in stressing the priority and prominence of the three persons revealed in history (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) over the unity of an eternal divine essence. Like the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed uses the word "God" with reference to the Father. It confesses, we believe in "one God, the Father Almighty." The phrase "one God" does not refer the unity of Godhead in the Trinity, but reproduces the language of 1 Cor 8 as is seen in the parallel phrase, "one Lord Jesus Christ" in the second article. Third, it makes more explicit than the Apostles' Creed the unity of the three persons is located in the Father. It is the Father who creates, the Son is the one "through whom all things are made."²

The challenge posed by Arius shifted the trinitarian discussion away from the economy of salvation to the ontology of God's existence. Since the Son is begotten (that is, created-Arius) by the Father, the Son must be less than the Father in his being. Thus while tracking with the economic way of speaking about God, the Nicene Creed transitions to an immanent way of speaking about God in order to confess the co-equality of the three persons. In other words, the Nicene Creed not only speaks about the three person with respect to their activity within salvation history, it also speaks about the three persons with respect to their eternal intra-divine relations in order to confess their full deity. The Nicene Creed attempts to do so in a way that is congruent with Scripture's pattern of words. Yet its response opened the door to another way of confessing the Trinity, namely, the immanent or ontological Trinity.

¹For example, "One God" refers to the Father in Acts 7:40; 14:11; 19:26; 1 Cor. 8:5; Gal. 4:8. "Only God" refers to the Father in John 5:44; 17:3; Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 1:25. "One God" refers to the Father in Mark 2:7; 10:18; 12:29-32; Luke 18:19; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19. Why assign that word to the Father preeminently? In 1 Cor. 8, the "one God" is contrasted with many gods. It is used over and against idolatry. This goes to the importance of creation as well.

²The creation of all things establishes the difference between creator and creation. Both creeds identify the Father as Creator and Ruler of all things in accord with the Old Testament's way of identifying and defining deity.

To that end, the second article focuses on what does it mean for the Son to be "begotten" (John 3:16) from the Father? It means the Son has his origin in the Father. Each of the phrases, God from God, light from light, very God from very God, begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father were intended to confess what it means to be "begotten," namely, it does not mean to be created! So also the Spirit finds his origin in the Father as one who "proceeds from the Father." As the Son is "begotten" and just so not created, so the Spirit "goes forth" from God otherwise than by being created but also "in some other way than by being begotten"! (The insertion of the of *filioque* in the ninth century upsets the nice symmetry).

As a result of Nicea, the self-relatedness of God moved to the forefront of theological reflection [LaCugna, 54]. Still rooted in economy, its emphasis was different in that it concentrated on the inner life of God and addressed the question, "how do the three persons relate to one another"? And so it focuses on the inter-Trinitarian relations. The language of *homoousios* paved the way for a shift of focus from the Father as the locus of unity to the one divine essence that is common to all three persons. By the fourth century, Christian theologians had concluded: The divine *ousia* exists as three distinct *hypostases*. By the fifth century Western reflection will begin with the one essence.

From the Nicene to the Athanasian Creed

Following Nicea, the Eastern church and Western church developed their trinitarian talk in different directions. Athanasius and the Cappadocians (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa) in the second half of the fourth century charted out the theological trajectories of Nicea that reached their pinnacle in the thought of John of Damascus in the eighth century. Augustine in the fifth century charted out the theological direction for the western tradition that was refined and developed by Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Both traditions agreed on the intra-Trinitarian vocabulary (unbegotten, begotten, and proceeding), but adopted different strategies for speaking about the *opera ad extra* in or world as the work of one divine agency. The east maintained the ontological priority of person and thus expressed the *opera ad extra* as the mutual work of all three persons. "All action that impacts the creature from God...begins with the Father and is actual through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. Augustine began with the ontological priority not of the person, but of the divine essence. Thus he worked from the axiom that God is simple and affirmed, "Whatever...is said of God is said of the Father, the Son and the spirit triply, and equivalently of the Trinity (J 111).

In so far as the Athanasian Creed is a western Creed it reflects Augustine's theology. One can see the Augustinian influence with the critical phrase: what the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. It follows this pattern for both the attributes and titles. Significantly, in the previous creeds,

the words "Almighty" and "God" were used to speak about the Father. Similarly, the word "Lord" was used in the previous two creeds to speak about the Son. But here in the Athanasian Creed, they are not used exclusively for one person over the others. Now each of these titles is interchangeable. Hence, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Spirit is Lord, yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord.

Summary

The economic and immanent Trinity both capture important biblical thoughts. Both approaches deal with the same God: first in his works within the world and then in his essence. The direction for trinitarian talk from the Apostles' through the Athanasian Creed moves from a dominance of economic statements to immanent statements about the Trinity. There was little choice. Without the ontological formulations of the Trinity, the economic language of God's work within the world would be evacuated of its soteriological value.

This is best seen in the struggle for the Gospel surrounding the Nicene Creed. All of the anti-Nicene factions sought to provide a semi-divine savior who could "stoop down" to us and suffer while God Himself remains free from such contamination. The Father was really God and Son could be considered "God" in that He is closely, extremely closely, or even infinitely closely associated with God. The Nicene Creed differentiated the God of the Gospel from the God of Hellenistic culture by affirming that the true God does not stand apart from history immune and untouched by history. He neither needs, nor does He provide, a semi-divine mediator of access to Him. He gives Himself. As a result, the Nicene Creed lays out two narratives (with two nativities) for Christ—one outside of time ("only begotten Son of God"), one within time ("who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven").³ Both are necessary for Gospel to be Gospel, namely, that in Christ we encounter the saving work of God Himself.

Thus the Nicene Creed shifted the focus to the ontological Trinity with its confession of the eternal narrative/nativity of the Son of God and its significance for us (in Christ we encounter the saving work of God Himself). In doing so, however, it equipped the Reformation with the ontological foundation for reconstructing the biblical narrative regarding the work of the Trinity within the economy of salvation. In doing so, the Reformation could draw out the soteriological significance of the Nicene Confession for the work of Christ in which we not only encounter God, but we encounter the loving heart of the Father.

³Athanasius refers to these as the *scopus* of Scripture.

The Reformation Contribution: From Ontology to Economy

The distinctively Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century can be read as recovering the biblical pattern for speaking about the Trinity. What Albrecht Peters observed about Luther in the catechisms holds true for the Lutheran Confessions in general. They reached back behind the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition (Peters, 40) to retrieve a biblical way of confessing the Trinity. They did not do so for the purpose of finding a model for intra-human relationships within society, but for the purpose of confessing the Gospel. In other words, the economic Trinity takes us to the very heart of the Father. Not only does God save, but it appropriate and proper that He saves. It is his nature to do so. This is the righteousness of God.

It is this soteriological purpose of God's revelation as Trinity that gets picked up and carried by the distinctively Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century. Both kinds of language, the ontological and economic, are used to convey the Trinity. But the ontological serves as the foundation for soteriology; the economic Trinity provided the framework for soteriology. The Reformation assumed the ontological Trinity as the background and proceeded to recapture statements about economic Trinity. Thus AC I uses the language of the Athanasian Creed before moving to the economic language of AC III. Similarly, Part I of the Smalcald Articles confesses the trinitarian substance of the creeds before moving on to the soteriological implications in Part II, namely, "Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, was handed over for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

In emphasizing the soteriological implications of the Trinity, the Reformation deepened the insights it inherited from the early church. As Paul Althaus points out, Luther finds not only the divine in the person and work of Jesus Christ, he finds the Father Himself. Jesus and the Father are held so firmly together that we learn to think of God only in Jesus Christ. This can be demonstrated in a number of ways, especially in the extensive discussion on justification in which Jesus reconciles us to the Father. This is perhaps most succinctly expressed in Luther's catechetical writings that culminated in the Large Catechism. Here we see first a confession of the three persons followed by a summary of their unity rooted in their soteriological work.

We can see both immanent-Trinitarian and economic-Trinitarian statements within two paragraphs of "Luther's Brief Explanation of 1520," where Luther first makes an immanent-Trinitarian statement followed by an economic-trinitarian statement: "not only" (immanent-Trinitarian statement) I believe "but also" (economic-Trinitarian statement).

According to this pattern, Luther develops his thinking in the Second Article concerning Jesus as the Son God in the following way: "I do *not only*

believe that this means that Jesus Christ is the one true Son of God, begotten of him in eternity with one eternal divine nature and essence – *but* I also believe that the Father has made all things subject to him, that according to his human nature he has been made one Lord over me and all things which he created together with the Father in his divinity.”

The same thought and formula carries over into the Third Article on the the Spirit: “I believe *not only* what this means – that the Holy Spirit is truly God together with the Father and the Son – *but* also that except through the Holy Spirit’s work no one can come in and to the Father through Christ and his life, his suffering and death, and all that is said of him, nor can anyone appropriate any of this to himself.”

Of the two approaches to the Trinity, the catechisms focus less on the intra-trinitarian relations of the three persons within the one divine essence, Luther concentrates on the Trinity’s self-turning toward the world.⁴

In order to set forth who God is and what kind of a God He is, Luther reorganized the Creed from twelve articles (corresponding to the twelve apostles) to its original three articles without altering the wording so that he could concentrate on the saving work of the Triune God and emphasize the *pro nobis* character of God’s work in all aspects life. This occurred in two stages. First, in 1520, Luther correlated the three articles to the three persons of the Trinity. Each article then tells “about one of the three persons of the Holy and divine Trinity. The first – the Father; the second the Son, and the third, the Holy Spirit” (1520:24). Second, Luther correlated the three articles of the Creed not only to the three persons, but to the particular gifts and works of each person. This theme comes out most prominently in his 1528-1529 writings, during which period, he attaches the captions, “creation, redemption, sanctification” to each article and thereby makes them the leading motifs for the three articles.⁵

So, how does Luther deal with the unity? The First Article in the Large Catechism offers a glimpse of what is to come. “These words give us a brief description of God the Father, his nature, his will, and his work” (LC II, 10).

⁴Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), II:39.

⁵Cf. Peters, *Kommentar*, II:37. The captions for the First and Second Articles are fairly obvious, but less so for the Third Article. Luther first uses the caption “sanctification” in the Visitation Articles. In the Third Article Luther had to contend with five disparate items and bring them into an organic unity. The Second Article seems to have provided the key as seen in his Sermon on 10 December 1528. As the individual items of the Second Article dealt with the person and work of Christ, so Luther took the individual items of the Third Article and identified them with the work of the Spirit.

These words proleptically draw attention to the conclusion of the Third Article where he picks up the trinitarian issue in a way that surpasses all previous explanations.⁶ Here Luther concludes, "Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words" (LC II, 63). For Luther God's essence and will expresses itself in his all encompassing care.⁷ All three articles reveal the fatherly heart of God and thus teach us to *know* God perfectly. In the conclusion to the explanation of the Creed, Luther looks back upon the whole Creed and explains:

In these three articles *God* himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his *fatherly* heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for his very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, *he* has given us his Son and *his* Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit (LC II, 64-65).

All who are outside the Christian church, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the *one, true God*, nevertheless do not know what this attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing. Therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit (LC II, 66).

"Hereby the catechism brings the works of the Trinity into a unity. The works of the Trinity cannot be lined up alongside one another in such a way that they stand as three isolated and disparate events. The work of any given person is always seen in relation to the work of the other two persons. And so the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit are not considered in and of themselves, but are seen entirely in the light of the Trinitarian faith" (Jansen, 84) for there exists an intimate interdependence, one might even say a mutual dependence among their works. When we encounter Christ and the Spirit, we encounter God himself – but this God is for Luther the Father.⁸

⁶Reiner Jansen, *Die Trinität in Luthers Auslegungen des Apostolikums 1520-29: Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre* (Frankfurt: n. p., 1976), 72.

⁷Peters, *Kommentar*, II:67-68.

⁸Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, 63.

Luther gives the Creed a narrative that proceeds from the Father (*A Patre*) by noting that God has created us in order to redeem us and sanctify us. The purpose for which God continues to create and sustain us, continues to protect and defend us in spite of sin, is that we might be saved. In a sense, the First Article stabilizes the patient and wheels him into the operating room of the Second and Third Articles where the disease is diagnosed and destroyed. The Second and Third Articles assumes the introduction of sin into the God's creation and thus focuses on God's gift of his Son for the world to rescue us from the domination of sin. Finally, the Third Article presupposes the work of Christ, particularly, his death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit carries out the work of implementing, administrating, and bringing to fulfillment the reign of Christ.

Luther also gives the Creed a simultaneous narrative that returns to the Father (*Ad Patrem*). Here the Father provides the terminus *ad quem* of the trinitarian work. This ordering answers the question, "for what purpose did God carry out his work in all three articles?" What is the goal of creation, redemption, and sanctification? Simply put, all three persons, together with their works, bring us back to the Father. All three works, creation, redemption, and sanctification, lead us to the fatherly heart of God. We find God's gracious fatherly heart only through the Son, to whom the Spirit alone leads us.⁹ The Spirit leads us to the Father through Christ who has reconciled us to the Father.

In the Creed, Luther has a simple goal: He wants "to get to the bottom of what God has done, is doing, and can be expected to do for us."¹⁰ The strength of Luther's presentation of the Trinity in the catechism is how each person of the Trinity plays an active and vital role within our lives. By connecting the three articles to the three persons and their works, the catechisms show that the "Giver and gift belong together; neither can be understood without the other."¹¹ Each plays a role that together they embrace the totality of our life in such a way that we cannot treat the Trinity as an item that we are to know about, but as three persons who give us a true knowledge of God Himself.

⁹Peters, *Kommentar*, II:39.

¹⁰Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching* (Hutchinson, Minn.: Crown Publishing, 1992).

¹¹Herbert Girgensohn, *Teaching Luther's Catechism* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), I:129.

Conclusion

The Creeds give us several strategies for speaking about the Triune story in order to proclaim the Gospel depending on the challenges we face. The Apostles' Creed offers the simplest and most straightforward pattern. It utilizes both biblical terminology and a biblical pattern that embraces the unity of Scripture from creation to the last day. The Nicene Creed also speaks of the Trinity in the economic language of Scripture. However, in order to preserve Gospel as the work of God over and against Arianism, it utilizes the biblical language of the narrative in order to confess the ontological Trinity. The Athanasian Creed perhaps provides the surest defense against tritheism and subordinationism but at the potential cost of distancing the trinitarian dogma from the biblical narrative. So, how do we proclaim the Triune narrative of the Gospel today?

The Reformation Confessions offer some helpful guidance. It is worth noting that the economic narrative of the Apostles' Creed is picked up and expounded in the Small and Large Catechisms. This narrative also provides the economical/soteriological framework for AC 2, 3, and 5. It is picked up again in FC 1. The Athanasian Creed, on the other hand, appears in AC 1, Apology 1, and the Smalcald Articles. One might say that with respect to the task of proclamation and catechesis, the Lutheran Confessions draw upon the biblical pattern of the Apostles' Creed. But when it comes to the need for theological precision or the legal definition of catholicity (Theodosian code), they turn to the Athanasian Creed. So, what does this mean?

First, in order to develop a trinitarian consciousness, one must begin with the economic Trinity as found in the Apostles' and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. In part this is because the ontological questions of a Hellenistic culture are not as prominent today. In part because this is the biblical pattern of the Gospel. The economic language for the Trinity allows us to revel in the particularities of the three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. It allows us to revel in their works. It shapes our piety and prayer. God is a particular God, namely, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It provides us with a way of relating the works of the three persons so as not to distort one through an over emphasis. Here we need to do much exploration and study of the biblical record. It is interesting that as a rule, the Father sends the Son and Spirit. The Father justifies and forgives. The Son comes from the Father and carries out the will of the Father. The Son does not reconcile us to Himself. Instead the Son reconciles us to the Father. He turns aside the wrath of God. He is the Mediator. What about the Spirit? On the one hand Christ is bearer and sender of the Spirit. On the other hand, the Spirit is another comforter. The Spirit pushes forward the mission of Christ. He brings the Word of God into the world through incarnation. Leads Him to do battle in the wilderness. He

raises Christ from the dead. Spirit proclaims Christ and brings us to Christ. What about prayers and benedictions. Pay attention to the economic pattern of events in the Gospel story.

Second, one cannot avoid ontological talk about the Trinity. To speak thus about God the Father will raise questions about the deity of the Son and Spirit as well as their unity. Moreover, prevalent heresies and errors are often shown to be such only by speaking of what we know of God in his essence, that is, ontological Trinity. Here it is necessary for teachers and preachers to have the intellectual facility to move from the economic to the ontological Trinity and back gain in order rightly to defend the Faith. Practically, speaking, this means that teachers and preachers must be wholly familiar with the various strategies for confessing the Trinity as found in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

How do we move from discussion of one to the other? Here I am partial to the Nicene Creed. In that connection, I might pick up what is known as Rahner's rule: the economic Trinity is the economic Trinity. Lately it has been used to virtually collapse the ontological Trinity into the economic Trinity. This raises the danger of pantheism. Others have used it in order to turn the Trinity into paradigm for ethics, society, and churchly community. Because God is like this. . .the world should be like this as well (xix). This, however, runs the danger of again distancing or removing the Trinity from the Gospel narrative. But it does at least suggest that the triune narrative as our story provides us with a glimpse of the triune narrative as God's story. A glimpse is just that. We must also speak of the hidden God. The mystery of salvation is tied to the mystery of the Trinity.

In this regard, I believe it may be most helpful to use the strategy provided by the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Cappadocians. It works more explicitly from the economic to the ontological Trinity. That is to say, there is something appropriate about the Father as unbegotten and source of the Trinity as the Father as the one who sends the Son and Spirit into the World. There is a connection between the Son being begotten and being born. The Son has two nativities! There is a connection between the Spirit's procession and the Spirit's mission in the world. The same applies to their unity. That is, it begins with the Father through the Son and in the Spirit and returns to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. The Cappadocians spoke of the perichoretic unity. To what extent does their relation in the structure of salvation tell us something about their inner life? If the Father is defined by relation to the Son and vice versa, can the same be said of the Son and Spirit? Does the role of the spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus say anything about the unity of the Son and Spirit in the Godhead? The early church focused on a Trinity of origins. From the future? Eschatology plays a

significant role in the biblical narrative. Can same be said of ontological Trinity?

Finally, in an increasingly pluralistic culture, Christians will carry on conversations with adherents of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. It will be tempting to speak of God more as a generic deity than to talk about the Trinity. After all, the "G-o-d" word establishes a certain "common ground" between the faiths. Consider the recent prayer service last Friday. The opening invocation intoned, "O God of David, Mohammed, and our Lord Jesus Christ." God seems to be the real substratum behind the various iterations of the different faiths. What about inter-faith dialogues? Where do we begin our discussion. Should we begin discussion about "God" or about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Can one begin with the former without immediately speaking of the latter? If we begin with the latter do we immediately cut off all further dialogue?

Within the culture at large, the word "God" most often involves an undeveloped sense, conviction, or idea of God that is probably nearer to pantheism (world is God) or panentheism (world is contained in God) than to classical monotheism (Toon, 17). C.S. Lewis, in his book *Miracles*, wrote, "We who defend Christianity find ourselves constantly opposed not by the irreligion of our hearers but by their *real* religion. Speak about ... a great spiritual force pervading all things, a common mind of which we are all parts, a pool of generalized spirituality to which we can all flow, and you will command friendly interest. But the temperature drops as soon as you mention a God who has purposes and performs a *particular* action, who does one thing and not another, a concrete, choosing, commanding, prohibiting God with a determinate character. People become embarrassed or angry" (Lewis, 99). The trend in theism today is away from speaking of God's transcendence and toward speaking of his immanence. Yet pantheism often results from bringing God too close to the world. Thus we must become more explicit in our God-talk so that we speak of God in a distinctively Christian way, that is, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.