"Eternally Begotten of the Father"
An Analysis of the Second London Confession of Faith's Doctrine of the Eternal Generation of the Son

By
Stefan T. Lindblad

"This question concerning the Distinction of the Divine Nature and these three most glorious persons which subsist in it, is the most difficult point in all Divinitie, and therefore I humbly beg the assistance of all these glorious persons, that I may conceive and write judiciously and reverently of this profound and glorious Mysterie of Faith."[1]

Introduction

The framers of the Second London Confession of Faith (2nd LCF) self-consciously adopted the order, as well as the majority of the language and content of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Savoy Declaration (SD), in part, "to manifest our consent with both, in all the fundamental articles of the Christian Religion, as also with many others, whose orthodox confessions have been published to the world."[2] Thus while departing from these major source documents on certain distinguishing doctrines, the methodological commitment and theological content of the 2nd LCF indicate its place alongside the other Reformed symbols of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[3] As these confessional standards have been regarded as

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[1] Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: or, the blessed Doctrine of the three coessential subsistents in the eternal Godhead without any confusion or division of the distinct Subsistences, or multiplication of the the most single and entire Godhead…* (London: T. R. and E. M. for Samuel Gellibrand, 1650), p. 97.

[2] *A Confession of Faith, put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians (baptized upon profession of their faith) in London and the Country* (London: for Benjamin Harris, 1677), preamble, p. 4.

[3] For a historical analysis of this claim see James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), pp. 1-29.

noteworthy for their biblical and churchly trinitarianism, the same may be said of the 2nd LCF.[4] The doctrine of the Trinity in the 2nd LCF is classical (i.e., creedal) and Reformed, an essential element of which is the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son: "the Son is eternally begotten of the Father" (2nd LCF 2:3; cf. 8:1). The task given to me by the theology committee of ARBCA is to offer some explanation of this confessional doctrine. What follows is much longer than previous circular letters. It is nevertheless limited in scope given the biblical, theological, historical, and contemporary significance of the doctrine under consideration. We cannot rehearse the history of the doctrine, examine all of its biblical and theological warrant, or engage fully the problems raised by contemporary theology. We can, however, analyze the 2nd LCF's formulation of the doctrine, arguing that its biblical foundations and theological content are sound, for which reason the doctrine as it stands is a necessary article of the Christian faith and thus the faith we confess.

1. Reformed Trinitarianism and Modern Evangelical Developments

Two potential obstacles present themselves at the outset of this study. First, despite extensive discussion of the codification of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in the patristic era, until recently little attention had been given to the detailed argumentation of the Reformers and their orthodox successors. Richard Muller's analysis is a much needed corrective. He demonstrates generally that Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries argued the classical doctrine of the Trinity on extensive exegetical grounds, especially against various forms of antitrinitarianism.[5] The subject has been broached also in response to Robert

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[4] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520-1725*, vol. 4, *The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pp. 103-104, hereafter cited as *PRRD*. Cf. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), pp. 164-69.

[5] Muller, *PRRD*, vol. 4. Cf. Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2007), p. 47: "The contributions of the Reformed orthodox to Trinitarian theology are not marked so much by innovative critique of the dominant tradition but rather defence of that tradition

Reymond's claim that Reformed trinitarian thought developed as an alternative to the formulae of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).[6] In addition to these studies, several other recent works shed significant light on various aspects of the historical and theological milieu in which the 2nd LCF affirmed the classical doctrines of the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Son.[7] There is, however, no comparable study of the trinitarianism of the seventeenth century Particular Baptists or their confessional documents.

The second obstacle is theological in nature. For various reasons, a number of contemporary evangelical theologians have rejected the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.[8] Not unrelated, having inherited (perhaps unwittingly) from modern theology the questionable assumption that the doctrine of the Trinity is

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in the face of radical attacks by those who rejected the creeds and who saw patristic theology as reflecting declension from, and perversion of, the pristine gospel of the New Testament."

[6] Paul Owen, "Calvin and Catholic Trinitarianism: An Examination of Robert Reymond's Understanding of the Trinity and His Appeal to John Calvin," *CTJ* 35 (2000): 262-81; Letham, *The Westminster Assembly,* pp. 94, 166-73; and Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), pp. 252-68.

[7] Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998); Trueman, *Reformed Catholic*, pp. 35-66; Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2003); Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008); Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), pp. 85-100.

[8] See, e.g., Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), pp. 305-06, 309-10; Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), pp. 179-84; Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (New York: Nelson, 1998), pp. 326-27; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 1233-34; Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), p. 162, n. 3; John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), pp. 488-92; J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), p. 594; and Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), pp. 27-28.

capable of generating other theological or socio-political agendas,[9] participants on both sides of the gender debate have argued that the eternal relation of the Father and the Son entails their respective position.[10] In doing so, some proponents of complimentarianism (i.e., male headship) reject the classical and Reformed doctrine of eternal generation, in its place advancing the idea of the eternal functional subordination of the Son (EFS). Although they affirm the deity of the Son and his consubstantiality with the Father and the Spirit, these theologians yet suppose the Son to be eternally subordinate to the Father in role and authority. Despite challenges to the orthodoxy and theological coherence of EFS, it nevertheless remains the case that a wide swath of evangelical thinking is not sympathetic to the 2nd LCF's doctrine of eternal generation.[11]

These two issues suggest that an analysis of the 2nd LCF's affirmation of this particular doctrine is necessary and timely. They show, as well, that significant dangers lie in our way, not the least of which are historical anachronisms and heterodox aberrations. To avoid these pitfalls it is necessary to understand that this particular

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[9] For analysis and critique of this trend, see Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 224-27; and Stephen Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History, and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), pp. 1-32.

[10] On the egalitarian side, see Gilbert Belizekian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," *JETS* 40 (1997): pp. 233-253; Stanley Grenz, "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," *JETS* 41 (1998): pp. 615-30; and Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); on the complimentarian side, see Stephen D. Kovach and Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son," *JETS* 42 (1999): pp. 461-76; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 248-52; Bruce A. Ware, "How Shall We Think about the Trinity?" in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. Douglas F. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 269-77; and Ware, *Father*, pp. 71-87.

[11] For challenges to EFS and the rejection of the eternal generation of the Son, see Keith E. Johnson, "Augustine, Eternal Generation, and Evangelical Trinitarianism," *TJ* 32 (2001): pp. 141-63; Letham, *Holy Trinity*, pp. 383-389; McCall, *Which Trinity*, pp. 175-88; and Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

doctrinal formula was carefully defined in the patristic era, confessed as orthodox for centuries, and by the Reformers and Reformed orthodox regarded as a fundamental article of the Christian faith elicited from and explained on the basis of Holy Scripture.[12] Moreover, in light of the charge that this ecumenical formula is speculative and unbiblical, it is paramount to consider the 2nd LCF's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son not only as belonging to this broad historical consensus, but also in terms of its biblical foundations and exegetical argumentation.

In doing so, we need to be clear, concise, and above all, careful. A consistent feature of the historic discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity is that this is a revealed mystery rather to be adored than enquired into by reason, since the Triune God is infinite and incomprehensible. For this reason, Nehemiah Coxe, likely one of the authors of the 2nd LCF, emphasized the limitation of reason, the sufficiency of revelation, and the necessity of faith.[13] "The Scripture doth also instruct us concerning the subsistence of God, or the manner of his being; and this is such a glorious mystery as by his word only is revealed to us; we cannot by reason comprehend it, but ought to adore it; and by Faith rest in his testimony concerning it."[14] What is to be known of God, and what is to be known of the eternal generation of the Son, is communicated to us, not that we might speculate according to our finite, even sanctified, reason, but that our faith would receive and our piety admire the truth of God's sufficient self-

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[12] This is not to suggest that there has been complete unanimity on every specific aspect of the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation; it is, however, the case that orthodox Christian theology from the fourth century through the early modern era unanimously affirmed that the Son is "begotten before all worlds…begotten, not made."

[13] On Coxe as a probable author of the 2nd LCF, along with his co-pastor William Collins, see Renihan, *Edification and Beauty*, pp. 22-26

[14] Nehemiah Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis, or a Confutation of the heresies and gross errours asserted by Thomas Collier in his additional word to his Body of Divinity* (London: for Nathaniel Ponder, 1677), p. 6. Cf. Theodore Beza, et al, *Propositions and Principles of Divinitie, propounded and disputed in the universitie of Geneva…* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1591), pp. 3-4; John Downame, *The Summe of Sacred Divinitie Briefly and Methodically Propounded* (London: William Stansby, 1625), pp. 33-34; and Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity* (London: A.M. for William Lee, 1662), p. 266.

revelation in Holy Scripture. Yet, as I contend, since Scripture teaches that the Son is the only begotten of the Father, we are faced with an important question, one which we are compelled to answer with all due reverence and humility: what does it mean to confess from the heart that "the Son is eternally begotten of the Father?"

I intend to answer this question in three parts. First, I establish at some length that the doctrine of eternal generation is to be understood within a rather strict set of theological parameters, since the 2nd LCF states and explicates this doctrine in the context of the doctrine of God. Second, I set forth the biblical foundations and theological content of the doctrine of eternal generation. Finally, I argue that EFS, as an alternative formulation to the classical and Reformed doctrine of the eternal relation of the Father and the Son, is incoherent and incompatible with the 2nd LCF's doctrine of the Trinity.

2. One in Trinity and Trinity in Unity: The Theological Context of the 2nd LCF's Doctrine of Eternal Generation

The 2nd LCF's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son does not reside in either a historical or theological vacuum. Recognizing the various contexts of this confessional doctrine is vital to a proper analysis. The immediate confessional context is the paragraph on the Trinity (2:3), itself situated in the chapter on the nature of God. Within the 2nd LCF the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation is formulated on the basis of Scripture: it is a fundamental article of the counsel of God "expressly set down or necessarily contained in Holy Scripture" (1:6), argued by way of the analogy of Scripture (1:9), and thus received by faith (1:10). The doctrine is briefly mentioned in subsequent chapters of the 2nd LCF, since it has implications especially for the doctrines of the covenant of redemption (7:3) and the Mediator's person and office (esp. 8:1-2). Moving out from this confessional epicenter, however, is the broader historical-theological framework provided by the 2nd LCF's source documents, the First London Confession of Faith (1st LCF), the WCF, and the SD, as well as the theology both of the

seventeenth century Particular Baptists and high Reformed orthodoxy. Quite obviously the theology of this specific era reflects the codification of Reformed theology by the second generation Reformers (ca. 1535 – ca. 1565) and its further elaboration and defense by the early Reformed orthodox (ca. 1565 – ca. 1640). In light of the doctrine under consideration it is also necessary to bear in mind that Reformed trinitarianism stands in basic continuity with patristic and medieval antecedents – not only individual theologians such as Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, but especially the formulae of the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), the 4th Lateran Council (1215), the Council of Lyons (1274), and the Council of Florence (1438-1442).[15] A more lengthy analysis of the 2nd LCF's doctrine of eternal generation would examine the significance of these interrelated contexts. For our purposes we are necessarily limited to only a few examples showing that the 2nd LCF's doctrine of eternal generation belongs to this stream of classical and Reformed trinitarian thought. Our primary focus in this section will be on the contextual constraints of the 2nd LCF itself, especially chapter 2.

This chapter adopts the standard scholastic arrangement of the doctrine of God, the exception being that unlike the large scale theological systems of late medieval and Reformed scholasticism the 2nd LCF (as also the WCF and SD) does not begin with a separate topic devoted to God's existence.[16] The 2nd LCF focuses on two topics: what is God (i.e., divine essence and attributes; 2:1-2), and what sort of God is he (i.e., Trinity; 2:3). This structural order does not suggest that the doctrine of the Trinity is of secondary importance to the confessional doctrine of God. The 2nd LCF employs a logical order, deemed necessary for pedagogical purposes, in which it first sets forth

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[15] A brief summary of the teachings of the medieval theologians and councils may be found in Muller, *PRRD*, 4:17-58. For an accessible treatment of the ancient creeds, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), pp. 81-108.

[16] Though, note Q. 2-3 of the Baptist Catechism in James M. Renihan, *True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family* (Owensboro, KY: RBAP, 2004), pp. 196-197. More than likely this omission in the 2nd LCF is not indicative of any aversion to the topic on the part of the Particular Baptists, but is due to the genre difference theological system and confessional symbol.

what distinguishes the one, simple, infinite God from finite creatures (2:1-2), and secondly the personal properties that distinguish one from another the three personal subsistences in this one infinite and divine essence (2:3). The opening clause of this paragraph not only confirms that the 2nd LCF is articulating this traditionary doctrine of God, but also establishes clearly that the Particular Baptists understood the two topics of this chapter to be necessarily interrelated or interdependent. There is no imbalance in the 2nd LCF between God's essential properties (2:1-2) and his personal properties (2:3).[17] God, as Cheynell was fond of saying, is in himself all absolute (i.e., essential) and relative (i.e., personal) perfection.

In fact, 2nd LCF 2:3 teaches in several ways that what has been said of God's essential perfection in 2:1-2 is necessarily predicated of the God who is one in Trinity. We will see momentarily why the 2nd LCF takes pains to do so, but generally speaking this paragraph underscores that whatever Scripture predicates of the one, true, and living God, is also predicated of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, even though what is proper to each subsistence (e.g., eternal generation) is not and may not be predicated of the divine essence. William Ames, whose writings had a pronounced influence on the shape of Particular Baptist theology, states this rule of predication succinctly: "The same essence is common to the three subsistences; wherefore, as concerning the essence, each singular subsistence is said rightly to be of itself. Nothing, moreover, is attributed to the essence, which may not be attributed to each singular subsistence, as concerning its essence. But those things that are properly attributed to each singular subsistence, as concerning its subsistence, may not be attributed to the essence."[18]

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[17] Contra Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, p. 165.

[18] William Ames, *Medulla Theologica* (Amsterdam: John Jansson, 1634), p. 16. Translation is mine. For an alternative English translation, see William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity…* (London: Edward Griffin, 1639), p. 15. The formative significance of Ames's *Medulla* on the Particular Baptists is evident from its use as a source document for the 1st LCF, as well as from its citation by Nehemiah Coxe in his polemical work against Thomas Collier. See Coxe, *Vindicae Veritatis*, p. 8, margin.

The 2nd LCF, therefore, goes to great lengths to teach both the unity and distinction of the divine nature; that is, the Triune God is one, simple, fully actualized, eternal, and infinite essence and at the same time the persons of the Trinity are distinct or distinguished. We are told, first, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three personal subsistences "in this divine and infinite Being." The persons are not outside of or distinct from the essence; they are distinct from one another *within* the one essence. Secondly, these three subsistences are said to have in common the one essence and thus all the essential properties: they are "of one substance, [of one] power, and [of one] eternity." They are not of *like* essence (*homoiousion*), nor are they of different essences (*heteroousion*), but are of the same essence (*homoousion*), and therefore of the same essential omnipotence and eternity. Third, each personal subsistence has "the whole divine essence," each one having the essence in a distinct manner – the Father as neither begotten nor proceeding, the Son as begotten of the Father, and the Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son. Yet, they are not three essences, or three gods, for the divine essence is numerically one and undivided. Finally, after stating how the three personal subsistences are simultaneously distinct but related – not begotten, begotten, proceeding – the 2nd LCF states again, rather clearly and powerfully, that such *personal* and *relative* properties in no way undermine God's essential unity, equality, and eternity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and Being: but distinguished by several peculiar, relative properties, and personal relations." Several observations are in order regarding this very precise and highly nuanced formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly as it provides the proper framework in which to understand the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation.

2.1. *The Common Divine Essence: Creedal Trinitarianism.* In this chapter the 2nd LCF identifies its doctrine of the Trinity, and thus its doctrine of the Son's eternal generation, as pro-Nicene. To say, "In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences…of one substance, power, and eternity…" is to say that the unity of the

persons is essential rather than volitional. That the unity of the Father and the Son was established by an act of divine will was the argument of both the Arians and semi-Arians of the fourth century: the Son was *like* God because of the Father's will to create or make the Son. Those who affirmed the *homoousion* of Nicaea argued instead that the Father and the Son are of the same essence. Constantinople extended this affirmation to the person of the Spirit.[19] Thus, the 2nd LCF argues that the three subsistences in the one infinite and divine essence are of one substance, and therefore of one power and one eternity. Though this teaching is affirmed everywhere by orthodox trinitarianism, it is expressed quite powerfully by the so-called Athanasian Creed: "And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal." This is precisely the teaching of 2nd LCF 2:3.[20] In which case, by wholeheartedly agreeing with such statements of trinitarian orthodoxy, the 2nd LCF rejects what creedal orthodoxy has always rejected, namely, the notion that eternal generation implies or entails the Son's subordination in the Godhead.

2.2. *The Common, Undivided Divine Essence*. The claim that each personal subsistence has the whole divine essence, yet the essence is undivided, is significant in two respects. First, that the 2nd LCF borrows all of this language, except for the term subsistence, from the 1st LCF (1646 revision) suggests that in 1646, 1677, and 1689 the Particular Baptists were eager to avoid any and all association with the rather vocal antitrinitarian movements of the era. By 1677, in fact, they were compelled to answer

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[19] Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), pp. 15-31.

[20] Individual theologians among the Particular Baptists also affirmed such creedal orthodoxy, as evidenced by Herculus Collins's unqualified recommendation of the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Apostles' Creed in *An Orthodox Catechism: Being the sum of Christian Religion, contained in the law and the gospel* (London: 1680), preface, unnumbered pp. 6-7.

the radical antitrinitarianism of Thomas Collier, a one-time Particular Baptist evangelist.[21] Stated positively, the Particular Baptists were eager to demonstrate their orthodoxy on this fundamental article of the Christian faith in view of both accusations to the contrary and the heretical views of a former minister in their communion of churches. They thus cut off at the root any charge of modalism, Sabellianism, or subordinationism (whether in ancient or modern forms) by affirming that each personal subsistence has the whole divine essence. By stating also that the essence is yet undivided they were precluding the charge of tritheism. In fact, in these few words the 2nd LCF reasserts not only the doctrine of the unity of God's essence (cf. 2:1, "…one only living, and true God"), but also the doctrines of God's simplicity (cf. 2:1, "without parts") and actuality (cf. 2:1, "a most pure spirit"), now, however, in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity. Though in the divine essence there is a Trinity of persons, three fully divine subsistences distinct from one another by virtue of certain personal and relative properties, the infinite and divine essence is numerically one, without composition, accidents, succession or mutation, and therefore, incapable of any kind of essential division, derivation, or gradation. God is what he is. He is his essence, and therefore, he can neither be divided nor become greater, lesser, or another thing. Hence, Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguished one from another, but the common essence is undivided. Jerome Zanchi – a significant early Reformed orthodox theologian who devoted a large portion of his career to articulating and defending the doctrine of the Trinity – states the same truth in a rather simple and straightforward manner.

> Being then *taught of God* in the holy Scripture, which is his word, we believe that there is but one God, that is, one most simple, indivisible, eternall, living, and most perfect Essence, subsisting in three Persons, to wit, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, being distinguished from each other, but yet without all manner

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[21] See Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, pp. 1-27.

of division…For thus we believe, as we are taught out of the holy Scripture, That the Father by himself is true & perfect God, the Sonne is God & the holy Ghost is also God: and yet there are not three Gods, but one God.[22]

Understood in this way, this clause is significant, secondly, because it draws attention to the *uniqueness* both of God's essential unity and of the distinction of the persons in the Godhead. By stating that the one, infinite God is a Trinity of personal subsistences, each having the whole divine essence, but without any division of the divine essence, the 2nd LCF argues against the strict identity of essence and subsistence (or person). This is a somewhat technical point, but one which has implications for a proper conception of the doctrines of the Trinity and of the eternal generation of the Son. The terms *God, Being, essence, or nature* do not describe a genus or class of which Father, Son, and Spirit are three essences, for instance, in the same way that the genus or class of humanity includes a number of distinct, individual beings (or essences). The common humanity of three human persons is a unity of genus (i.e., generic unity) or a unity of species (i.e., specific unity) that can be and is divided. God, however, is an *infinite* and *divine* being. He is not limited as is every created, finite being (e.g., by space, time, composition, potentiality, etc.). As such, the divine unity is a numerical unity, incomparable to anything in the created order. Drawing on Deut. 6:4 and 1 Cor. 8:4, Bucanus answers the question, "How is God said to be one?" by noting, "Neither by a genus, nor species, but in Essence and in number, or in regard of his nature: because there is one onely Essence of God, and that indivisible."[23] This is critical for understanding the distinction of the persons: they are not distinguished as are individual human persons, out of or apart from the essence, but within the essence, according to their distinct manner of subsistence. We thus find statements to this effect

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[22] Hieron. Zanchius, *The Whole Body of Christian Religion*, trans. D. Ralph Winterton (London: John Redmayne, 1659), pp. 13-14.

[23] William Bucanus, *Body of Divinity, or Institutions of Christian Religion…* (London: 1659), p. 5

among the Reformed orthodox: "The Person in the Deity, is neither the species of God, or of the Deity, nor a part thereof, nor another thing besides the Deity, nor a bare relation, nor the manner onely of subsisting, but the very essence of God, with a certain manner of subsisting."[24] To state it another way, the divine nature has a manner of subsistence that is very different from that of any created being. Muller summarizes Reformed orthodox thought on this point quite helpfully: "Specifically, *ousia* [being] or *theotos* [deity] refers to the unity of the Godhead in a manner different than the reference of the common essence of humanity to individual human beings – whereas divinity, as Father, Son, and Spirit, is numerically one God, human beings, one in essence, are numerically many."[25] Thus, we confess that the Father is infinite and divine, having the whole divine essence; the Son is infinite and divine, having the whole divine essence; and the Spirit is infinite and divine, having the whole divine essence. Yet they are not three essences, for the common essence is undivided. As for what appears to be the logical contradiction here – speaking of one in three, or three in one – Owen argues well,

> Distinction of persons (it being an infinite substance) doth no way prove a difference of essence between the Father and the Son. Where Christ, as mediator, is said to be another from the Father or God, spoken *personally* of the Father, it argues not in the least that he is not partaker of the same nature with him. That in one essence there can be but one person may be true where the substance is finite and limited, but hath no place in that which is infinite.[26]

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[24] Johannes Wollebius, *The Abridgement of Christian Divinitie…*, 3rd edition (London: 1660), p. 22.

[25] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:175.

[26] John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae; or, the Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined* (1655), in *Works*, 12:170-171. The same statement appears, almost verbatim in Owen, *The Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:383.

This also means that God is not a quaternity: three persons and the essence itself. The divine essence is not distinct from the persons as a thing. In the Trinity there is another and another (*alius et alius*), not another thing and another thing (*aliud et aliud*). The Father and the Son, for instance, are distinguished from one another *personally*, as to their distinct manner of subsistence in the divine essence, but not as separate things from or out of the divine essence. Since they each have the same undivided nature or essence, "They differ not in their Natures as three men or three Angels differ, for they differ so as one may be without the other; but now the Father is not without the Sonne, nor the Sonne without the Father, so that there is the same numerical Essence."[27]

This careful statement of the unity and distinction of the divine nature has two far reaching implications. First, the Son, as eternally begotten of the Father, is personally distinct from the Father, but not of a lesser, different, or subordinate essence. The Father, though he is first in the order of subsistence and in the order of historical operations (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4-6), is not primary essence and the Son a secondary or other essence. "To argue otherwise," Muller notes, "is to claim real or substantial distinctions between the persons, to reduce the unity of the persons to a generic unity…and to produce either a form of tritheism or a radical subordinationism."[28] Secondly, the personal property of the Son – to be eternally begotten of the Father – must be understood as the begetting of an infinite and divine subsistence (not essence) *within* the one, eternal, undivided, infinite and divine Being. Whatever the analogy between human begetting and divine begetting, the former is of a *finite* essence belonging to a finite genus or species (i.e., humanity) and therefore cannot be the measure of the latter. Coxe's explanation of this point echoes the very teaching of the 2nd LCF.

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[27] Leigh, *Body of Divinity*, p. 253. Cf. Bucanus, *Body of Divinity*, pp. 5-6.

[28] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:179-80

Now unto these relative properties [of each divine subsistence] belong all imaginable perfection, but no imperfection because they are in God: Therefore as considered in him they do infer personality, because a personal subsistence, is the most perfect manner of being in the whole reasonable nature…Though in our conception of personality in the Divine nature, we must separate from it whatsoever imperfection is seen in a created person: Every created person hath a limited essence distinct and distant from one another: But all the increated [uncreated] persons in the Deity have the same immense undivided essence, and are the one Eternal immortal invisible only wise God.[29]

The collation of biblical texts cited by the 2nd LCF indicate that this doctrine is not the fruit of rationalism; rather, this is a doctrinal formulation grounded in Scripture (cf. 1:6) as interpreted according to the analogy of Scripture (cf. 1:9). God's proper or essential name, "I am" (Exod. 3:14), reveals that he alone is "infinite in being, and perfection" (cf. 2:1). God is essential or absolute perfection: he is one, simple, infinite, and divine essence. Yet, John 14:11 and 1 Cor. 8:6 interpreted side by side establish that this divine name is properly predicated of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit for two reasons: first, because of the unity of the divine essence and the mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) of Father, Son, and Spirit in the one divine essence (John 14:11); and, secondly, because Scripture ascribes divine names and divine operations in common to both the Father and the Son (1 Cor. 8:6). The Father, the Son, and the Spirit each have the whole divine essence. The Son, therefore, has in common with the Father and the Spirit all the essential properties of the divine essence (2:1-2). He is *very God*, eternal, immense, Almighty, perfect, and infinite. For God is one in Trinity. At the same time, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three slices of one pie, three parts of an apple, three forms of water, or three individual essences of one generic essence, since the one God who reveals himself as "I am" is neither distributed into three parts or

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[29] Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7.

components, nor divided into three graded essences or ranked persons: God is Trinity in Unity.

2.3. *One Essence, Three Subsistences: The Confessional Language of Unity and Distinction.* The 2nd LCF, in fact, carefully safeguards this understanding of the unity of the divine essence and the distinction of the persons by adopting the rather technical vocabulary of one *Being* (or nature, essence) and three *subsistences*. Tritheism says that Father, Son, and Spirit are three different *essences* of the genus God. Modalism and Sabellianism argue that the one divine essence or person manifests itself in three modes or roles externally, in the works of creation (Father), redemption (Son), and sanctification (Spirit), while subordinationism claims that the one divine essence is marked by a gradation of degree or rank. Orthodox trinitarianism rejects these formulations, teaching instead that the distinction of persons is intrinsic to the Godhead. *Within* the one infinite and divine *Being* (or essence) there are three consubstantial, coequal, and coeternal *persons* or *personal subsistences*. In theological usage person and subsistence are roughly equivalent; both are attempts to describe the distinction of persons in the Godhead. Yet certain Reformed theologians argue that *subsistence* is preferable because it expresses more precisely than the loaded term *persona* the import of the Greek term *hypostasis,* a term with biblical precedent (Heb. 1:3).[30] It is frequently the case, in fact, that even theologians who employ the term person explain it by use of the word subsistence. Amandus Polanus, for example, writes, "A person of the Deitie, is a subsistence in the Deitie, having such properties, as cannot be communicated from one to another."[31] In 2:3, however, the 2nd LCF employs

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[30] Coxe, for instance, appeals to Heb. 1:3 as supplying "warranty of this term" subsistence, "where it is applied to the Father, (and there is the same reason for our using it, when we speak of the Son or Spirit)." See Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7. Cf. Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, pp. 83-84; and Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992), 1:253-54.

[31] Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf, *The Substance of the Christian Religion…* (London: R. F. for John Oxenbridge, 1597), p. 13. Cf. Zacharius Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*

only the term subsistence, with precedent in the Reformed tradition "as a precise description of the way the persons related to the essence of God."[32]

By itself subsistence can describe a being's mode or manner of existence. So, for example, the 2nd LCF uses this term to speak of the manner of God's essential self-existence: he subsists in and of himself eternally (cf. 2:1). As used in the doctrine of the Trinity, however, the term describes the personal mode or manner of existence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, *within* the one divine nature. Used of these three *personally*, therefore, it underscores that they are simultaneously *distinguished* one from another and *related* one to another *personally* without division of the divine essence. To say, for example, that the Son is a subsistence in the one God is to say that he has his own personal manner of existence within the Godhead, by which we know, on the one hand, that he is neither the Father nor the Spirit and, on the other hand, that he is eternally related to the Father and the Spirit in the one, common divine essence. Coxe suggests the significance of this terminology by stating that God "is the Divine essence, *subsisting* in three relative properties: the relative property of the Father is to beget…The relative property of the Son is to be begotten; The relative property of the Holy Spirit is *to be breathed,* or to *proceed* from the Father and the Son…"[33]

This technical vocabulary – essence and subsistence – is thus designed to maintain "the utter unity of the divine being while at the same time safeguarding with precision the way in which the one essence is also three."[34] This is why the 2nd LCF goes on to state, again incorporating the language of the 1st LCF (1646), which borrowed significantly from Henry Ainsworth's so-called True Confession (1596), that the three subsistences, Father, Son, and Spirit, are "all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God who is not to be divided in nature and Being; but distinguished

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(reprint, Columbus: 1852), pp. 131, 133; William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine,* in *Works,* 1:14; Wollebius, *Abridgement,* pp. 21-22; and Leigh, *Body of Divinity,* pp. 253-54.

[32] Muller, *PRRD,* 4:184. Cf. 2nd LCF 8:2, which uses the term "person" with respect to the Son.

[33] Coxe, *Vindicae Veritatis,* pp. 6-7.

[34] Muller, *PRRD,* 4:184.

by several peculiar, relative properties, and personal relations." This statement makes explicit what is entailed in the language of three subsistences in one essence, or one essence in three subsistences. The Son, for instance, is distinct, not from the essence, but from the Father and the Spirit as a personal subsistence within the essence. He is distinguished, in other words, by personal properties that are unique, incommunicable, or "peculiar" to his individual subsistence. It can only be said of the Son that he is the Son "eternally begotten of the Father." This also describes the manner of his "personal relation" to the Father. The Son is not a different thing from the Father. As subsistences, inhering in the divine essence, they are necessarily related, but in such a way that neither the essence is divided nor the persons confounded. Thus, to be a personal subsistence in the Godhead, is to be distinguished from the other personal subsistences *personally*, but not divided *essentially*. Father, Son, and Spirit are three fully divine and infinite *subsistences* within the one, undivided, infinite and divine Being or nature. We will address the implications of this for the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation more fully in the next section. At this point, however, we note that the 2nd LCF is intent on highlighting this basic, yet ineffable and incomprehensible truth revealed in Holy Scripture: the one God is Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. Cheynell expresses this truth soberly and succinctly. We do well to mark his words:

> We do believe that God is one, most *singly and singularly one*, and *an only one*: The unity of the Godhead is not a *generical*, or a *specifical* unity, but a most singular unity…All the three Persons have one and the same single and infinite Godhead, and therefore must needs *mutually subsist* in one another, because they are all three one and the same infinite God. *Three consubstantial, coessential, coeternal, coequal Persons, are distinguished, but not divided, are united, but not confounded*; united in their *one* nature, not confounded in their distinct subsistences; nay though their subsistence is in one another, yet their subsistences are distinct, but their nature most singularly the same; nay *the*

divine nature is as singular as any one of the singular subsistences, and yet whatever is proper to the Divine nature is common to all three of these Divine subsistences; and the Divine nature doth not subsist out of these three Divine subsistences."[35]

With these contextual constraints in view, then, I turn next to the doctrine of eternal generation more narrowly considered.

3. The Eternal Generation of the Son

The intent of the previous section has been to underscore that when the 2nd LCF speaks of the Son's personal subsistence, of what distinguishes him as the Son from the Father and the Spirit, it does not do so in the abstract. He is not separated or divided from his relation to the Father and the Spirit within the one, common divine essence. Cheynell states well a rule that we must bear in mind while discussing the person of the Son: *"when we describe the Divine nature, we should not abstract it from the three Persons; and when we describe a Divine Person we should not abstract him from the Divine Nature."*[36] Thus, to speak of the Son's distinct subsistence, his personal manner of existence or his peculiar, incommunicable properties, is to speak of the Son in the concrete, as he inheres or subsists in the one divine essence, himself having the whole divine essence, and therefore, of one substance, of one power, and of one eternity with the Father and the Spirit. While he is distinguished as the Son, in other words, we can never forget his own words: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30); or, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (John 14:11).

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[35] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, p. 42.

[36] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, p. 80, emphasis original. In email correspondence Dr. James M. Renihan reminded me that Cheynell's rule is reminiscent of the words of Gregory Nazianzen, a fourth century Greek theologian and key figure at the Council of Constantinople (381): "No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One." Owen cites these very words in *Works*, 2:10, n. 1.

With that said, we have noted at length *that* the Son is distinct from and related to the Father and the Spirit as to his personal subsistence. The key question, however, remains: *what* distinguishes him, or *how* is he distinct? What are his peculiar relative properties and his personal relation? Coxe gives us the answer: "The relative property of the Son is to be begotten."[37] To understand this doctrine I consider first its theological content and secondly its biblical foundations.

3.1. *Theological Content.* In addition to his proper name, "Son," which is incommunicable, the Son is personally distinguished from and personally related to the Father by reason of this incommunicable property: he is "eternally begotten of the Father." Only the Son is the Son, and only the Son is begotten of the Father. Yet because he is begotten *of the Father,* he is eternally and personally related to the Father within the divine essence. In order to understand the manner of the Son's generation of the Father it may be helpful to observe how Owen approached the subject, even though he states his formulation of the doctrine in his polemic against the Socinian argument that the classical doctrine of eternal generation is a logical impossibility. Owen begins by noting that such an argument is "the fruit of measuring spiritual things by carnal, infinite by finite, God by ourselves, the object of faith by corrupted rules of corrupted reason." Owen insists, however, that because Scripture plainly teaches that the Son is *eternally* begotten of the Father and is his proper Son we cannot object to the doctrine by measuring what is supernatural and infinite according to what is physical and finite. "What is impossible in finite, limited essences," he writes, "may be possible and convenient to that which is infinite and unlimited, as is that whereof we speak." A positive definition of the doctrine follows: "We say, then, that in the eternal generation of the Son, the *whole* essence of the Father is communicated to the Son as to a *personal existence* in the same essence, without multiplication or division of it, the same essence continuing still one in number; and this without the least show of impossibility in an

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[37] Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7.

infinite essence, all the arguments against it being taken from the properties and attendancies of that which is finite."[38]

Though the 2nd LCF does not use the word *communication* that is surely the intended meaning of the term it does use: "begotten." It is imperative to note, however, what Owen and the Particular Baptists do not say. It is not the divine essence that begets or is begotten; if that were the case the divine essence would be divided. "The divine essence neither doth beget, nether is begotten: because that which doth beget, is in very deed, distinguished from that which is begotten: now the divine essence, being but one and most simple, it cannot be distinguished from itself."[39] The Socinians objected to the doctrine of eternal generation, notes Bucanus, by arguing, "The Essence of the Father is communicated to the Sonne by generation, therefore there is one Essence in the Father, another in the Sonne, because there is one Essence begetting, and another begotten." He responds, "We must distinguish betwixt generation and communication: for the person begets and is begotten, but the Essence neither begetteth nor is begotten, but communicated."[40] For the essence absolutely to beget or absolutely to be begotten would divide the indivisible essence. Rather, the Father begets the Son; the Son is begotten of the Father. At the same time, however, the Father does not beget the Son out of his (the Father's) personal subsistence. For the Father to communicate his person to the Son would mean that the Son just is the Father, or the Father just is the Son. This is to compromise the distinction of the persons. Instead, "The divine persons are distinguished by their inward and personal actions. *The Father did from all Eternity communicate the living essence of God to the Son, in a most wonderfull and glorious way*."[41]

The key, then, to understanding this doctrine resides in the confessional teaching that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "each have the whole divine essence." The manner in

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[38] Owen, *Works*, 12:237, emphasis original.

[39] Polanus, *Substance*, p. 14.

[40] Bucanus, *Body of Divinity*, p. 15.

[41] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, pp. 188-89, emphasis mine.

which the Father, as the Father, has the whole divine essence is "of none," since he is "neither begotten nor proceeding." The manner in which the Son, as the Son, has the whole divine essence is by the Father's "inward and personal" act of begetting or communication. The question the doctrine of eternal generation answers is this: how does the Son have the whole divine essence, but in such a manner that the one common essence is not divided and the distinct persons are not confounded? The answer is simple, yet profoundly mysterious: The Son, as to his personal subsistence in the divine essence (i.e., as the Son), has the whole divine essence because the Father *personally* communicated *his* whole essence (i.e., the whole divine essence the Father has of himself) to the Son *personally*. Having affirmed that the very essence and nature of God is in Christ, so that he is God, Zanchi defines eternal generation in these very terms, at the same time affirming that the Son, as he is God, is of himself. He writes at length,

> Indeed, from whom does he then have [the whole divine essence]? Of himself, or of another? If you say of himself simply, then he has not been generated of the Father. For what is it to be the Son generated of the Father, if not God of God, light of light, very God of very God, as the fathers at the Council of Nicaea defined it from the word of God? He is, most certainly, generated of the Father. Therefore, he has his essence and whatsoever he is of the Father. Yet in what manner does he have this? By being begotten of the Father. He is therefore generated of the substance of the Father. This generation, however, is eternal, so that God the Father was never without God the Son. Likewise, generation is most perfect, so that the Father's whole essence is communicated to the Son without any diminution, alteration, or mutation, but the whole yet remains in the Father. And, therefore, one is not able to say that the Son's essence is derived, created, or essentiated from the essence of the Father, since the simple essence that is in the Father is communicated fully to the Son. It is for this

reason one may accept the language of certain pious persons that the Son, as he is God, is of himself, that is, the essence that is in the Son is not of another essence, but is self-existent. For it is neither created nor properly speaking generated, as if it were another thing, but the same is communicated.[42]

We may also note the way Perkins states the doctrine in keeping with the language of Nicaea, maintaining both the Son's eternal generation as the Son and his aseity as fully divine:

> In the generation of the Sonne, these properties must be noted: I. He that begetteth, and he that is begotten are together, and not one before another in time. II. He that begetteth, doth communicate with him that is begotten, not some one part, but his whole essence. III. The Father begot the Sonne, not out of himselfe, but within himselfe…The incommunicable property of the Father, is to be unbegotten, to bee a Father, and to beget…The two other persons have the Godhead, or the whole divine essence, of the Father by communication…The Sonne is the second person, begotten of the Father from all eternity…Although the Sonne bee begotten of his Father, yet nevertheless, he is of and by himselfe very God: for he must be considered either according to his essence, or according to his filiation or Sonneship. In regard of his essence, he is (*autotheos*) that is, of and by himselfe very God: for the Deitie which is common to all the three persons is not begotten. But as he is a person, and the Sonne of the Father, hee is not of himselfe, but from another: for hee is the eternall Sonne of his Father. And thus he is truely said to be *very God of very God.*[43]

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[42] Hie. Zanchius, *De tribus Elohim, Aeterno Patre, Filio, & Spirtum Sanctum…*, in *Omnium Operum Theologicorum* (1619), col. 249.

[43] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:14.

In light of the teaching of the 2nd LCF particularly and Reformed orthodoxy generally, I offer the following definition of the Son's eternal generation of the Father: *the Father's necessary, eternal, supernatural and incomprehensible personal act of communicating his whole essence to the Son, as to the Son's personal subsistence, without any imperfection, dependence, succession, multiplication, mutation, causation, derivation, confusion or division, either of the one common divine essence or of the distinct personal subsistences of the Trinity.*

While it is tempting to construe this generation in terms known to us, namely on analogy with human procreation, we must pay close attention to both the contextual strictures and the very language used by the 2nd LCF to describe the Son's eternal generation of the Father. Specifically, it is important to recognize that the Son is *eternally* begotten of the Father. He is, as the 2nd LCF later reminds us, "infinite, without beginning." He is neither created nor made, as if he were another thing external to the divine essence or another thing caused by the Father. Indeed, the Son's generation of the Father is without beginning, without end, and without succession. This indicates, moreover, that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father *within the unity of the Godhead*.[44] The Son's generation is an *ad intra* (i.e., internal, within the Godhead) personal work of the Father, the person begetting, and an *ad intra* personal work of the Son, the person begotten. For this reason, it is also necessary, rather than voluntary, and is, as Zanchi said, most perfect. To this relative property of the Son, Coxe says, "belongs all imaginable perfection, but no imperfection," because the Son is begotten of the Father "in God."[45]

Because the Son's generation of the Father is eternal, internal, necessary, and most perfect, its manner – that is, how the Father communicates his essence to the Son – is "supernatural" (literally, *hyperphysical*) and therefore "unspeakable."[46] Pictet, in

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[44] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, p. 189.

[45] Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7.

[46] Lucas Trelcatius, Jr., *A Brief Institution of the common places of Sacred divinity* (London: T. P. for Francis Burton, 1610), pp. 56-57.

fact, states this in the strongest possible terms: "Here the understanding of not only of men, but of angels, is at a loss; here we must lay our hands upon our lips, and be silent."[47] The point being made is that the Son's eternal generation cannot be construed in the very same way as the begetting of human procreation, or the begetting entailed in the graces of regeneration and adoption. Every act of begetting is an act of communication from the one begetting to the one begotten: yet here is where the analogy begins and ends. For in the birth of a human son, a father communicates the seed of life, which produces another thing with its own distinct essence. The generic human essence is divided, as a human father communicates that essence out of himself, not within himself. So, in time, there is one before (a human father) and another after (a human son). By virtue of being begotten, a human son moves from a state of potentiality (or non-existence) to another state of potentiality (a living, growing, changing human being). In the case of regeneration, a communication of grace renews the component parts of the soul. Change, great change has taken place! So also with adoption: a new status is communicated by divine grace, before which one was a servant in sin and after which one is an adopted son of God. Though we could multiply the differences, this much is clear: every imperfection accruing to finite acts of generation or begetting must be removed, negated, so to speak, in order to apprehend something of this infinite mystery of the Son's generation of the Father.[48] For not only is he the natural (not adopted) and eternal (not created) Son of God, but is also *eternally* begotten of the Father within the divine essence.[49] Indeed, this divine act of generation within the Godhead is not one of mutation or creation. Nothing new is produced or caused. The Son is not derived from the Father or propagated by the Father as another thing. He is not hereby subject to succession or change, moving from non-existence (potentiality) to existence (actuality). He is thus not other than or less

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[47] Benedict Pictet, *Christian Theology*, trans. Reyroux (Geneva: 1696; London: 1834), p. 114.

[48] Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7.

[49] See Collins, *Orthodox Catechism*, p. 13.

than the Father in degree, rank, or authority. All manner of ontological subordination is precluded. Neither, moreover, is the divine essence subject to change, succession, multiplication or division. Having argued already that this generation takes place within the unity of the Godhead, and is therefore perfect, Cheynell states the significance of all these negations in a rather profound manner.

> The Father did beget his Son without change or motion after a most glorious and wonderfull manner; there can be no change, no motion, or succession in this eternall and most perfect generation. The Essence of God is spirituall, John 4.24, and therefore the Son is not begotten of the Father's seed, or any material substance, because God is a single and most pure Act, who doth beget a Son within himself Essentially one with himself, and therefore his Son doth not subsist out of himself, John 14.10, John 10.30, for an infinite nature cannot be poured forth beyond itself. There can be no essential change in the Son by this generation, because the generation is eternall, and the nature which is communicated by generation is unchangeable; the Father did unchangeably beget his Son, and his Son is unchangeably begotten, there is no shadow of changing or turning either in the Father of lights, or the Son of righteousness, because they are the one and the same unchangeable Jehovah, James 1.17, Malach. 3.6. They are too carnal and base who make an unworthy and odious comparison between the material generation of a weak man, and this more than spirituall and supernatural generation. The eternall and unchangeable Father doth beget an eternall and unchangeable Son according to the perfection of his eternall, unchangeable, infinite nature. The Father doth beget his Son naturally, and therefore in a way agreeable to his unchangeable Nature; if the Son were not necessarily begotten, his being would not be necessary, and then his Essence would not be divine.[50]

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[50] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, pp. 195-96.

Even though we are limited in what we can say regarding *how* the Father communicates his whole essence to the Son, we must say *that* he does so necessarily, indeed, in a truly eternal, spiritual, supernatural, immutable, perfect, infinite, and therefore, ineffable and incomprehensible manner within the unity of the Godhead. The doctrine cannot be dismissed on the grounds of our inability to comprehend, especially since God has revealed that the Son is the consubstantial, coequal, and coeternal Son of the Father, "begotten before all worlds…begotten, not made."

3.2. *Biblical Foundations*. Yet is this the case? Is the doctrine of eternal generation taught in Scripture? Scripture most certainly teaches the unity of the divine essence and the distinction of persons (Exod. 3:14; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 61:1-2; Matt 3:17; Matt 28:19; John 10:30; John 14:10-11; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14). Scripture also teaches, I argue, the Son's eternal generation in two ways. The doctrine is "expressly set down" and "necessarily contained" in Scripture (2nd LCF 1:6). This, in fact, was the conviction of our Particular Baptist forefathers. They argued that a doctrine was to be believed only the authority of God speaking in Scripture (2nd LCF 1:10). For this reason, following the WCF and the SD, they cited John 1:14, 18 as the primary biblical foundation of the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation. As we will see, however, the doctrine does not rest *entirely* on these two verses, but is taught clearly and sufficiently across Holy Scripture, a conviction shared not only by the Particular Baptists but by Reformed theology more broadly.[51]

A brief word is in order regarding the 2nd LCF's practice of citing biblical texts. To call this a "proof-texting method" in the modern derogatory sense is misleading. We have been taught that proof-texting is poor exegetical and theological method: "a text out of context is nothing but a pretext." By citing specific texts in support of their statements, the authors of the confession were indicating their adherence to a far more nuanced exegetical and theological method, one characteristic not just of Reformed

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[51] Coxe, for example, also cites Psalm 2:7 and John 3:16, in Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7.

orthodox biblical interpretation but also of the whole sweep of pre-critical exegesis (i.e., before the inception of higher critical exegesis). The texts cited here by the confession are regarded as the primary seat of the doctrine, the primary (not exclusive) place in Scripture where the doctrine was either explicitly taught or "by just consequence deduced."[52] By citing these texts the authors of the confession were not arbitrarily appealing to texts out of context. Rather they were drawing on the interpretation of these texts as argued in the biblical commentaries and annotations of the era. The statement of the confession is thus a doctrinal result resting on the foundation of Scripture and its proper interpretation. The biblical texts cited thus point in two directions: back to biblical interpretation and forward to doctrinal formulation. Such texts, commonly spoken of as *dicta probantia*, literally "proving statements," function as the necessary methodological link uniting biblical interpretation and doctrinal formulation. A confession is not designed to reproduce the work of biblical interpretation, but to affirm its fruit, given that this was the only authoritative and sufficient foundation for every doctrinal topic and for the way through the entire system of theology. Thus, when the framers of the 2nd LCF cited John 1:14, 18, they were not guilty of a crude form of proof-texting, but were instead reflecting a whole tradition of interpretation that they understood to be utterly indispensable and foundational for this doctrinal construct.[53]

The Particular Baptists agreed with the WCF and the SD that the doctrine of eternal generation was the result of a proper interpretation of John 1:14, 18. Since the

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[52] Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 9.

[53] For a helpful survey of the dependence of theological formulation on biblical interpretation, see Muller, *PRRD*, 2:442-520, esp. pp. 502-20; and Richard A. Muller, "Scripture and the Westminster Confession," in Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Public Worship*, The Westminster Assembly and the Reformed Faith, vol. 1, ed. Carl A. Trueman (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), pp. 59-82. Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), s.v., *sedes doctrinae* (p. 278): "*a seat of doctrine*: the particular text of Scripture used as the primary foundation of a doctrine."

late nineteenth century, however, the growing consensus has been that the term formerly rendered "begotten" is better translated "only" or "unique." Most evangelical commentators today favor this reading of all the passages that use the term *monogenes* (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).[54] Does this mean the doctrine is without biblical warrant, as some have suggested? It should be noted that even the most ardent defenders of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son agree that *monogenes* is to be understood as "one and only."[55] Yet the doctrine itself, as both Letham and Giles contend, does not depend entirely on this one word.[56] Letham, in fact, with a bit of rhetorical flourish, goes so far as to say, "are not those best qualified to assess the meaning of a first-century Greek word native Greek speakers of the centuries closest to the time? The Greek fathers understood *monogenes* in these Johannine passages to mean 'only begotten.' Were they less qualified to determine its meaning than people living nearly two millennia later who speak a different language? Nonetheless, the doctrine of eternal generation does not stand or fall on the basis of this one word. Its validity is based on the teaching of the eternal sonship and the relation of the Son to the Father in the undivided being of God."[57]

Letham is correct to point out that in every case where John uses *monogenes* to define the Son's eternal relation to the Father he also employs the verb *genao* (to beget) to describe the regeneration or the new birth of believers.[58] If so, the idea of begetting cannot be entirely removed from our conception of the eternal relation of the Father and the Son. Though we cannot offer an exhaustive interpretation of these Johannine passages here, three observations are in order. First, John speaks of the Son, the *monogenes*, as a fully divine person. In John 1:14, not only is the glory of God ascribed

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[54] See, e.g., D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 128; and Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 93-94.

[55] See Giles, *Eternal Generation*, pp. 63-66, 81-82.

[56] Letham, *Holy Trinity*, pp. 383-88. Letham also notes that the older reading has not been entirely eclipsed in Letham, *Holy Trinity*, p. 384, n. 12.

[57] Letham, *Holy Trinity*, pp. 387-88.

[58] Letham, *Holy Trinity*, p. 385.

to the Son, but we are also told that the only begotten of the Father is the Word, the very Word who "is God" (1:1). For which reason, every attribute predicated of God in Scripture is properly predicated of the Son.

Secondly, as a fully divine person, however, he is distinct from yet most closely related to the Father. The Word, the only begotten of the Father, "was with God" (1:1). He is himself God, of the same essence of the Father, having the same, whole, undivided divine essence. At the same time, he is distinct from the Father by virtue of his unique or incommunicable properties: he is the Son, the only or only begotten Son, of the Father (1:18). The Son is not the Father, nor is the Father the Son. Yet they subsist in the Godhead in the closest of all relations. In fact, the Gospel writer expresses this truth by the most poignant and pregnant of phrases in verse 18: the only begotten Son "is in the bosom of the Father." John 3:16, 18 and 1 John 4:9 are to the same effect: they describe the relation sustained between the Son and the Father. Even if, therefore, one adopts the modern rendering of the term *monogenes*, because the Son is uniquely related to and distinct from the Father as *his* Son, we have every warrant to retain the idea of begetting. Begetting lies at the very root of every father-son distinction and relation.

Finally, in all five texts, the distinction and relation of these two fully divine persons, Father and Son, is eternal. This is most certainly the case in John's prologue, which twice reminds us that the Word or the Son was in the beginning with God (1:1-2). In John 3:16, 18 and 1 John 4:9, the only begotten Son is understood to pre-exist his historical operations *just as* the only begotten Son of the Father: the Father gave him, the Father sent him, not thereby making him his only begotten, but *as his eternally begotten Son.* None of these works are the cause or the reason that Christ is called the only begotten Son. Rather the works manifest that he is the only begotten of the Father, even as his works manifest that the Son and the Father are of the same essence (John 14:10-11). All of these texts, therefore, are describing what the Son, in terms of

his "peculiar relative properties and personal relations," has been from all eternity: the Son "eternally begotten of the Father."

In addition to these texts, a number of additional biblical passages have been understood historically to teach, if not explicitly, by good and necessary consequence, the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation. Perhaps the key text is John 5:25-26: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 'The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself'" (ASV). Two considerations indicate that this act of communication is eternal, and therefore, descriptive of the Son's eternal generation of the Father. First, v. 27 goes on to speak of Christ's work in history of communicating eternal life to needy sinners, in which work he is ascribed the title "the Son of man," a title reserved for his incarnate mission. In vv. 25-26, however, he is denominated by his proper name which speaks of his eternal distinction and relation to the Father: "the Son of God" and "the Son." This at least suggests that what is being described in v. 26 is a communication of life from the Father to the Son prior his incarnation. That this is, in fact, an eternal communication of life is confirmed, secondly, by John 1:4. John there says of the eternal Word, the eternal Son, "in him was life." The Word, or the Son, has the essential divine property of self-existence.[59] If the 2nd LCF's doctrine of divine simplicity is correct, therefore, necessarily contained in this passage of Scripture is the truth that the Father eternally communicated, not just this one divine attribute, but the whole divine essence to the Son. For this reason, the so-called Westminster Annotations concluded on the basis of this text that the Gospel writer "rendereth a reason of that he said the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live: because God the Father, who is the eternal Fountain of Life, communicateth his whole essence to the Son: so that, as he is the

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[59] Cf. D. A. Carson, *John*, pp. 256-57; Giles, *Eternal Generation*, pp. 85-86.

eternal Word and Wisdom of God, He hath all things of himself."[60] This is precisely the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation.

The Reformed orthodox, as well as the Particular Baptists, regarded a large collation of biblical passages as either teaching or confirming this doctrinal formulation.[61] Cheynell, for example, argues four conclusions regarding the doctrine of eternal generation, all of them drawn from Scripture. First, Psalm 2:7 collated with Hebrews 1:3-6 grounds the claim that "the Father did beget his Son."[62] Against the objection that these texts refer to historical realities, Cheynell appeals to Matthew 3:17, 19:5, Acts 13:32-33, and Romans 1:4 to argue the point that Christ's anointing, transfiguration, and resurrection are not the cause of his sonship or generation, but are rather the manifestation of his eternal sonship and eternal generation.[63] Second, that the Son's generation of the Father is eternal is argued on the basis of Proverbs 8:22-23, 25 as interpreted alongside Micah 5:2, John 1:1-3, John 17:5, Colossians 1:15, and Revelation 1:18. Not all of these texts are understood to teach explicitly the doctrine. Instead, because they attribute to the Son the divine property of eternity they confirm that his generation of the Father is eternal.[64] Third, that the Son is begotten of the Father in the unity of the Godhead is a point argued from Romans 8:32 and John 5:18. Christ is the Father's "own" or "proper" Son, and the Father is Christ's "own" or "proper" Father. On John 5:18 Cheynell writes, "the Jews did well understand the force and importance of that expression, for say they, in that he said God is his own Father, he hath made himself equall with God; and therefore the phrase doth import that *he* is

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[60] *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testaments…* 3rd edition (London: Evan Tyler, 1657), in loc., John 5:26.

[61] For diversity of interpretation on some of these texts, while still maintaining the biblical validity of the doctrine, see Muller, *PRRD*, 4:260-62, 275-88

[62] On these two texts, see also Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, pp. 7, 21.

[63] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, pp. 191-93.

[64] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, p. 193. Coxe also argues that Prov. 8:22-23, 25, interpreted in light of John 1, teaches the doctrine. See Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, pp. 11-12.

the *Naturall* and *Coessentiall* Son of God, else he could not be *Coequall* with his Father."
John 5:26 is, again, significant in this respect:

> God hath but one Coessentiall Son, to whom he hath given to have *life in himself*,
> John 5.26. because the Divine Nature, which is *life* itself is communicated to the
> Son by this eternall and ineffable generation. It is proper to *living* creatures to
> communicate their nature by generation in their low and imperfect way; but the
> great God who is not subject to imperfection, doth after the most glorious and
> perfect manner beget a Son in the unity of his own *living* Essence, who is
> therefore called the Son of the *living* God, that is the Naturall and Coesentiall
> Son of God, who hath the same Divine Life, Nature, Essence with the
> Father…The same single and infinite Essence is in the Father, Son, and Holy
> Ghost; the whole undivided and indivisible essence of God dwels in the Son in
> its fulnesse and infinite perfection.[65]

In view of the previous three points, Cheynell concludes that because God is spiritual
(John 4:24) and immutable (James 1:17), the Son's eternal generation of the Father is
spiritual, devoid of all change, motion, and succession.[66]

Modern interpretations of certain individual texts may differ, even as there was
difference of opinion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for instance, regarding
the referent of Psalm 2:7. Nevertheless, we ought not to be too quick to dismiss the
older exegesis. More to the point, it is clear from this brief survey that the doctrine of
the Son's eternal generation was not based on one text, let alone one word. For the
Particular Baptists, as for Reformed orthodoxy, this doctrinal formulation was the
result of a large collation of biblical texts, interpreted by the analogy of Scripture. We

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[65] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, pp. 193-95.
[66] Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, pp. 195-96.

can say, we must say, therefore, that the doctrine of eternal generation is "expressly set down" and "necessarily contained in Scripture."

4. Eternal Functional Subordination?

There are several arguments advanced among evangelical theologians today for rejecting the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation.[67] I have addressed several of these in the previous sections. First, every shred of historical evidence, including the carefully worded trinitarianism of the 2nd LCF, sufficiently demonstrates that it is simply contrary to historical fact to claim that the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation actually supports the Arian heresy. Second, though the manner of the Son's eternal generation is incomprehensible, it is not illogical or incoherent. You and I may not be able to comprehend *how* the Son is the Son of the Father, but we may, indeed, must apprehend by faith *that* he is the Son of the Father. For, third, the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation is "expressly set down" and "necessarily contained" in Scripture, so that the frequently repeated assertion that the doctrine lacks biblical warrant is also wanting.

There is, however, another, far more subtle argument that has gained wide acceptance among evangelicals, which, because of its intention to safeguard the clear biblical teaching of male headship, is all the more dangerous. Prominent evangelical theologians, among them Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware, contend that in the home and the church women are subordinate in role or authority to men because the Son, from all eternity, is subordinate to the Father in role or authority. The Son's eternal distinction from and relation to the Father is best understood, they argue, as eternal functional subordination (EFS). These theologians are most certainly correct to point out that Scripture teaches complimentarianism. Yet, the attempt to root this teaching in

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[67] Giles, *Eternal Generation*, pp. 33-37, identifies six overlapping objections: the doctrine (1) has no biblical warrant; (2) is of neo-Platonic origin; (3) is illogical and incoherent; (4) serves no theological purpose; (5) is unnecessary since there are better ways to define the distinction of the divine persons; and (6) implies or necessarily entails either the Son's eternal subordination or the Arian heresy.

the intra-divine life is not only seriously flawed, but is, in no uncertain terms, contrary to the Scriptures, the trinitarianism of the 2nd LCF, and creedal orthodoxy. For the sake of brevity, I will take Ware's treatment of the subject as representative.

Ware begins his discussion of the person of the Son on solid ground, stating that the three persons of the Trinity are consubstantial, having in common the undivided divine essence, yet personally distinct.[68] In answer to what distinguishes the Son from the Father, however, he says that what makes the Son the Son in relation to the Father is not his eternal generation of the Father, but instead "eternal submission under the authority of his Father."[69] The Son, therefore, is eternally and necessarily subordinate to the Father. Ware's case rests fundamentally on his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:3. In this text, he avers, Paul teaches that male headship is "a reflection of the authority and submission that exists in the eternal Godhead." The early church, he contends, taught this "built-in authority structure" among the persons of the Trinity by speaking of an eternal order (*taxis*) of the Godhead.[70] Ware seeks to confirm this notion of the eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father on the grounds of the Son's submission during his incarnation and earthly ministry, as well as his pre-incarnate and eschatological submission to the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24, 28).[71]

While Ware's argument deserves a more thorough response than is possible here, I draw attention to four aspects of the argument that demonstrate its incoherence and its incompatibility with the teaching of the 2nd LCF. First, Ware minimizes the significance of Paul's explicit and intentional use of the Son's official name, Christ, in 1 Cor. 11:3, a name which signifies not that the Son was *eternally* subordinate to the Father, but that the Son incarnate *in fulfillment of his office of mediator* voluntarily submitted to the will of (the Triune!) God. Paul does not teach in this passage the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, but the incarnate Son's official,

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[68] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,* pp. 69-71

[69] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,* p. 71.

[70] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,* pp. 72-73.

[71] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,* pp. 73-85

historical, economical submission to the Father as mediator. The same applies to Ware's interpretation of the sending language in John's Gospel and 1 Cor. 15:24, 28.[72]

Second, Ware misunderstands and misappropriates historic Christian teaching. A notable instance is his use of the concept of *taxis*, the order of the persons of the Trinity. Neither the church fathers nor the Reformed theologians who employed this concept understood the order of the persons in the sense of either essential or personal submission. In "the persons of the Deity," wrote Bucanus, "there is an order, but there is none inequality."[73] Ursinus explains the order of the persons as an order of existing, or subsistence, in which "no person of the Godhead is before or after the others in time, dignity, or degree, but only in the order in which they exist."[74] Trelcatius says virtually the same, explicitly contrasting the order by which the persons of the Trinity are distinct from one another with any and all notions of "degree, state, or dignity."[75] The order, then, is not one of eternal submission within the one, simple, fully actualized and eternal divine nature but, as Coxe states, an order of "eternal origination," in which "there is no priority of time or nature."[76] *Taxis* identifies an irreversible order by which the Father is distinguished personally by his incommunicable property of being neither begotten nor proceeding, the Son by his incommunicable property of being begotten of the Father, and the Spirit by his incommunicable property of proceeding from both the Father and the Son.[77] *Taxis* has never been understood to teach, as Ware thinks, "God's headship over his Son."[78] This is not an order of "rank or hierarchy, but

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[72] For an example of Reformed orthodox interpretation of these texts, see Owen, *Works*, 12:201-203.

[73] Bucanus, *Body of Divinity*, p. 13.

[74] Ursinus, *Commentary*, p. 135.

[75] Trelcatius, *Brief Institution*, pp. 56-57; Cf. Perkins, *Works*, 1:14.

[76] Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7.

[77] Ursinus, *Commentary*, p. 135; Trelcatius, *Brief Institution*, pp. 56-57; and Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, p. 7.

[78] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, p. 77.

of…an appropriate disposition."[79] This technical theological term, therefore, is used by orthodox trinitarianism for the sake of maintaining the very doctrines Ware rejects as speculative and unbiblical, the Son's eternal generation and the Spirit's eternal procession, and at the same time contradicts the very doctrine he seeks to defend, the Son's eternal functional subordination.

Another instance of the misappropriation of historic Christian teaching is Ware's contention that Augustine taught (or at least adumbrated) this doctrine of eternal submission.[80] Ware assumes that when Augustine speaks of the Son being sent from the Father that he is describing an eternal relation. Yet, in the passage cited, Augustine is arguing that it was appropriate or fitting for the Son to be sent from the Father, for the Word and not the Father to become incarnate, because the Son is begotten of the Father, not vice-versa. In what can only be described as a theological sleight of hand, Ware not only denies the very doctrine taught by Augustine, eternal generation (and that only in an endnote to an all together different chapter!),[81] but also flattens into a strict identity or equality Augustine's understanding of how the eternal Father-Son relation (begetter-begotten) is, in some sense, the foundation for the economical Father-incarnate Son relation (sender-sent). Augustine is arguing only that the *incarnation* does not contradict the Son's consubstantiality and coequality with the Father, not that the Son's *eternal submission* is consistent with consubstantiality and coequality.

These historical anachronisms point to the third and fourth objections to Ware's doctrine of the Son's eternal functional subordination. Ware's argument consistently assumes the total identification of the Son's eternal personal subsistence in the

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[79] Letham, *Holy Trinity*, p. 383.

[80] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, pp. 79-80.

[81] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, p. 162, n. 3. Ware interprets the biblical language of begotten and proceeding in the same manner as did the Socinians and Socinianizing Arminians of the seventeenth century, arguing that these refer to the historical realities of incarnation and Pentecost, respectively. The Reformed orthodox, as also the Particular Baptists, consistently reject this argument. See Owen, *Works*, 12:169-248; and Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, pp. 1-27.

Godhead with his personal work in God's external work of redemption. He takes for granted, in other words, that what is true of the Son in the economy of redemption is necessarily identical with the Son's eternal relation to the Father. This is evident particularly in his interpretation of 1 Cor. 11:3, as well as his claim that all of the sending language in John's Gospel just is an eternal, ontological reality. There is a relation between what the Son incarnate accomplishes in history and what the Son is from all eternity; however, the relation is not one of strict identity. We must maintain a careful distinction between the Son's personal subsistence in the Godhead and his office as the incarnate Mediator.[82] Yes, this is one and the same person, but his eternal generation of the Father is an eternal, personal, and *internal* act of both the Father (the one generating) and the Son (the one generated), while the Son's execution of the office of Mediator is an *external* act, *personally* accomplished by the Son incarnate (i.e., *Christ*). The works of incarnation and mediation, to put it differently, are the *appropriated* works of the Son incarnate, willed essentially by the Triune God, but terminating upon the Son personally, rather than on the Father or the Spirit. The Son's eternal generation, as well as his voluntary role in the covenant of redemption (cf. 2nd LCF 7:3), is the trinitarian *foundation* of his personal works of incarnation and mediation. The only begotten Son was chosen and ordained, according to the intratrinitarian covenant of redemption, to be the Mediator between God and men (cf. 2nd LCF 8:1). Yet he was not *already submitting* in eternity. Rather he was chosen and ordained *to be submissive,* which he then did by assuming a true human nature, yet without sin (cf. 2nd LCF 8:2). The eternal, personal, internal (*ad intra*) acts of the Son are the eternal ground of his historical, personal, external (*ad extra*) acts in the economy of redemption. They are not, however, one and the same work.[83] I assume he would reject the conclusion, yet Ware's argument does not easily avoid the charge of

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[82] For a careful argument regarding this distinction, one which counters subordinationist claims, see Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), pp. 75-78.

[83] For a helpful discussion of the works of God as *ad intra* and *ad extra*, see Muller, *PRRD*, 4:257-274. Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, pp. 7, 11-12, approximates these distinctions.

the necessity of an eternal incarnation of some sort. We cannot say, therefore, that the incarnate Son's economic subordination is indicative of eternal subordination, either with respect to the divine essence or his personal subsistence.

Finally, and most serious, Ware's argument that his conception of the eternal distinction between the Father and the Son, as one of eternal functional subordination, is compatible with the biblical and historical teaching of the consubstantiality and coequality of the persons of the Trinity is not plausible. Ware compromises the *homoousion* of creedal orthodoxy.[84] If, as the 2nd LCF teaches, the Father and the Son are "of one…power" (coequal) because they are "of one substance" (consubstantial) then the Son's personal distinction *cannot* be construed in terms of a subordination of rank or authority. Here we must remember the rules, so to speak, of trinitarian predication. What is said of the essence is and must be said of the persons, since each one has the whole divine essence. Divine omnipotence – authority or power – is an essential property of God, an attribute properly predicated of the divine essence. God is omnipotent. If the Son has the whole divine essence, if the Son is *very God*, therefore, he is omnipotent and almighty, no less than and no other than the Father and the Spirit. As we've seen above, though it is a mystery, it is fully consistent with the coequality and consubstantiality of the persons to say that the Son, as to his personal subsistence, is eternally begotten of the Father. In fact, the doctrine of eternal generation is intended to safeguard the essential unity of the Father and the Son, since the doctrine highlights the manner in which the Son has the very same divine essence as the Father! Yet, to say that the Son is subordinate to the Father in terms of authority is to say that he is of a lesser or of a different authority than the Father. To say that is to claim that the Son is not of the same essence (*homoousion*) but only of *like* essence (*homoiousion*) or of a different essence (*heteroousion*). In which case, not only is the mystery of God's Triunity compromised, but so also is the mystery and wonder of the

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[84] McCall, *Which Trinity,* pp. 178-188.

incarnation and humiliation of the Son.[85] For the consubstantial and coequal Son, existing in the form of God, himself having the whole divine nature, is the very one who nevertheless assumed the form of a servant – not in eternity, but in the fullness of time – humbling himself, being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8-9; cf. 2nd LCF 8:2). We are compelled to conclude, therefore, that Ware, and those who share his position, articulate not only an incoherent doctrine of the Trinity, but one that is incompatible with the 2nd LCF specifically and historic creedal orthodoxy more broadly.

The truth of complimentarianism does not stand or fall on the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible is clear, and need only be read according to proper principles of interpretation, to substantiate male headship in the home and in the church.[86] To root this doctrine in an appeal to the Trinity is quite dangerous, as it attempts to explain what is finite on the basis of what is infinite. McCall rightly cautions, therefore, "it is wrong to allow other concerns – however legitimate and worthy in their own right – to dominate and dictate our doctrine of the Trinity." In the gender debate, moreover, "the very fact that 'complimentarians' and 'egalitarians' alike can appeal so readily to the doctrine of the Trinity for support should give us pause. If it is so easy for the various sides to make such appeals, do not such appeals run the risk of being vacuous? Is it not obvious that the doctrine of the Trinity can all too easily become a 'wax nose'? And should not this prospect be sobering to those Christians who take seriously the biblical warnings against idolatry?" What is needed in this debate is not heat emanating from trinitarian error, but the light of Scripture: "Rather than try to make arguments from the doctrine of the Trinity into 'conclusions' that are simply not

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[85] McCall, *Which Trinity,* pp. 185-186.

[86] For the kind of straightforward reading of Scripture that I have in mind here, see W. Robert Godfrey, "Headship and the Bible," in David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds., *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship? The Equal-Regard Marriage and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 82-91.

implied by the orthodox doctrine, the various parties in these disputes would do well to proceed with the remaining hermeneutical and exegetical work."[87]

Conclusion

Words fail us. Yet the Word of God does not fail. It is certain, sufficient, and infallible. Reason fails us. Yet God's self-revelation in Scripture does not fail. This Word, this revelation, is clear: the Son is "eternally begotten of the Father." Though we have noted at some length what this doctrine does and does not mean, as well as our inability to comprehend the manner of this generation, we must recognize also that this is a practical doctrine. It is part and parcel of that doctrine of the Trinity which is "the foundation of all our Communion with God, and our comfortable dependence on him." In fact, eternal life hinges on whether or not we know and believe *this* Son, the only begotten Son of the Father (John 3:16). The danger is clear: "He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son" (John 3:18). Yes, this doctrine is a mystery. Yet, it is a revealed mystery necessary not only for worship and prayer, but fundamentally for our salvation, for true, saving faith. As Leigh so well states, "This is a wonderful mystery rather to be adored and admired than enquired into; yet every one is bound to know it with an apprehensive knowledge, though not with a comprehensive. No man can be saved without the knowledge of the Father; he hath not the Father who denieth the Sonne; and he receives not the holy Ghost who knows him not, John 14. 17."[88] May the Triune God grant us the grace to confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts that Jesus is the Christ, *the Son of the living God*, begotten before all worlds, indeed, begotten, not made. Amen.

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[87] McCall, *Which Trinity*, pp. 226-227.
[88] Leigh, *Body of Divinity*, p. 266.