

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

THE IDENTITY OF THE FATHER: DEFINING THE NATURE OF THE RELATION  
BETWEEN THE GOD OF JESUS, AND THE GOD OF ISRAEL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
MANUEL BOGLIO

JUANA DIAZ, PR

APRIL 2022

## CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction.....	1
Purpose and Methodology.....	6
Key Terms and Concepts.....	13
God.....	13
Nature and Identity.....	16
The “Is” of Identity and Predication.....	18
Some Final Presuppositions.....	19
Outline of Chapters.....	21
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE FATHER IN SCRIPTURE AND EARLY CHURCH FATHERS.....</b>	<b>24</b>
Introduction.....	24
The Father in the Old Testament.....	25
The Father’s Relation to Israel.....	26
The Father and His Messiah.....	27
The Father in Second-Temple Jewish Literature.....	31
The Father in the New Testament.....	33
The Father in the Gospels.....	34
The Gospel Pattern.....	38
The Father in the New Testament Epistles.....	42
Remaining Epistles and Revelation.....	47
The Father in the Writings of the Early Church Fathers.....	50
Conclusion.....	56
<b>CHAPTER 3: DIVINE IDENTITY IN SECOND-TEMPLE JUDAISM.....</b>	<b>58</b>
Introduction.....	58
The Second-Temple Concept of Divine Identity.....	60
Summary of Richard Bauckham’s View.....	60
Critique of Bauckham’s View.....	63
Divine Identity in Scripture and Second-Temple Literature.....	68
The Pauline Pattern.....	76

The Pauline Pattern, Explained.....	79
The Pauline Pattern in the Early Church Fathers.....	85
The Pauline Pattern and Divine Identity.....	95
Paul and the Shema.....	98
Conclusion.....	104
<b>CHAPTER 4: GOD’S NATURE AND THE IDENTITY OF THE FATHER.....</b>	<b>107</b>
Introduction.....	107
God’s Nature.....	109
God’s Nature, Defined.....	109
Does God Have a Nature?.....	112
What is God’s Nature?.....	121
Eternity.....	122
The Anselmian God.....	125
The Father “is” YHWH.....	130
The “is” of Identity and Predication.....	132
Objections.....	144
Conclusion.....	151
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING MATTERS.....</b>	<b>156</b>
Initial Problems and Thesis.....	156
Chapter Summaries.....	158
Chapter 1.....	158
Chapter 2.....	159
Chapter 3.....	162
Chapter 4.....	165
Conclusion and Further Study.....	170
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>173</b>

## ABSTRACT

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most difficult doctrines to explain and comprehend. Historically, trinitarian discussions, especially during the first four centuries, have centered on the deity of Christ and His relation to the Father. Later, this discussion centered on the deity of the Holy Spirit, and His relation to both the Father and the Son. The identity of the Father, however, is rarely discussed, but rather it is simply assumed. The Father is simply the first Person of the Trinity, the God of Israel, YHWH. The problem, however, is that, for Christians, YHWH is triune. As such, if the Father is YHWH, then this implies that the Father is also triune. This project seeks to take up the task of firmly establishing, and then clarifying, the identity of the Father, especially as it relates to YHWH. It begins by establishing that, throughout Scripture, second-temple Jewish literature, and in the writings of the early church fathers, the Father was most clearly identified as YHWH, the God of Israel, whereas Jesus was identified as His Son. From here, Richard Bauckham's notion of divine identity is argued for, and defended, showing how this concept formed the theological background of the New Testament. After explaining the relation between YHWH's identity and nature, it is shown that the "is" of predication can be used to clarify the claim that "The Father is YHWH." Lastly, the concept of divine identity is used to synthesize all of the findings together and show how the doctrine of the Trinity can be affirmed, while avoiding the charge of internal incoherence.

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

### Introduction

There can be no doubt that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most difficult doctrines to explain and comprehend. One of the generally agreed-upon criteria for evaluating worldviews, or truth claims, is internal coherence. As stated by Thomas Senor, “A body of doctrine, or any set of claims, is logically problematic if it is logically *inconsistent* or if it *entails a contradiction*.<sup>1</sup> Simply put, if a worldview is internally incoherent, or a truth claim is logically contradictory, then it is more likely to be wrong or false. This is true for Christian doctrine, as well, if not more so than for other truth claims. For some, the doctrine of the Trinity presents this very problem of internal coherence, making truth claims that, at least on the surface, seem to be logically inconsistent or even contradictory. One such problematic truth claim involves the notion of identity, which is understood, today, by most logicians as a relation that is both symmetrical and transitive.<sup>2</sup> The meaning and implications of this can be expressed in a simple formula: If *A* is identical with *B*, and *B* with *C*, then *A* is identical with *C*. To be sure, it is unlikely that the early Christian church, when formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, had this technical notion of identity in mind, but it is nevertheless helpful in helping us understand why the doctrine of the Trinity is so problematic for so many people, even for those who affirm it.

Applying this notion of identity to the doctrine of the Trinity brings about certain difficulties that must be resolved. For example, if the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, then how do we avoid tritheism? This, of course, has historically been one of the central issues in the church’s discussions about the Trinity, and in large measure has been

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas D. Senor, “The Incarnation and the Trinity,” *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 238.

<sup>2</sup> William Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 59.

considered resolved by the widely accepted formula, *One Ousia, Three Hypostaseis*. Although the exact meaning of these terms is more ambiguous than one would like, today they are generally translated as *One God, Three Persons*. This formula represents the conclusion of at least two or three hundred years of much debate, centering around the divine nature of Jesus (and, later, the Spirit), and His relation to the Father. In fact, as acknowledged by Arthur Wainwright, the so-called “problem” of the Trinity “arose because Christians believed that Jesus was divine, and expressed their belief by giving him divine titles and ascribing to him functions which were usually reserved. . .for God.”<sup>3</sup> The point that Wainwright is trying to make is that the doctrine of the Trinity essentially only exists because early Christians struggled with explaining how Christ could be divine, and yet there be only one God.

In this debate, which lasted centuries and, in a sense, continues for some, today, the identity and nature of God, the Father, seems to have always simply been assumed, focusing the discussion, instead, on the Son’s relation to the Father.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we begin with the assumption that the Father is God, and then we attempt to explain how Jesus can also be God, and yet not be the Father. Later, this debate shifted to the Holy Spirit, and His relation to both the Father and the Son. In both cases, the identity and divine nature of the Father is assumed, and the discussion centers around the relation of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father. In my research on the Trinity, however, I have yet to find any significant discussion on the identity of the Father, Himself, and *His* relation to God, or YHWH.<sup>5</sup> For some Christians, this relation may

---

<sup>3</sup> Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 3.

<sup>4</sup> These terms, *identity* and *nature* will be further defined, below. For now, they simply refer to who the Father is, namely God.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the rest of the dissertation, especially when speaking about the relation between the Father and YHWH, I will be using this term “relation” conceptually, rather than relationally. In other words, to speak about

seem fairly obvious, if not self-evident, for the Father's deity has never been in doubt.<sup>6</sup> After all, the Father has been revealed in the Old Testament (it is believed), and only in the Incarnation do we ever begin to ponder on His full identity as triune. It seems that for most people, then, the Father is simply God, the very God revealed in the Old Testament (YHWH), with the question being whether Jesus (and, later, the Spirit) is God, as well, and in the case of the affirmative, how to explain this reality. The truth of the matter is not that simple, however, but very few people seem to have taken the time to discuss the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity on the doctrine of the Father (and vice versa), nor to explain the Father's identity in relation to the God of Israel. This, I contend, leads to the possibility of affirming a doctrine that is logically inconsistent, contradictory, or simply unclear, a point that will be made clearer throughout this dissertation.

The question at the heart of this issue is, who is the Father, and what is His relation to the God of Israel? The answer to this question directly influences, and is also influenced by, the answer to another question, namely, who is the God of Israel? Up until at least the third century, the Father was assumed to be the Godhead, from whom the Son and the Spirit proceeded.<sup>7</sup> It was only near the time of the Council of Nicaea that this language of the *Godhead* was used, not just

---

the relation between the Father and YHWH is not meant to be understood as speaking about a relationship between two Persons or Beings. Rather, what I mean is that we (Christians, primarily) have this concept of who YHWH is (the God of Israel, for example), and we also have this concept of who the Father is (the first Person of the Trinity). The question of relation, then, is about how these two concepts harmonize with one another, if at all. For example, let's say that the chef of a particular restaurant is male, and there is a man named Bob that is said to be the chef at that restaurant. We can ask about the relation between the chef of the restaurant and Bob without assuming the two are separate persons or beings. In fact, to ask this question is precisely to try to determine whether they are one and the same person or not. In contrast, if we were to ask about the relation between Bob and his father, this is a relational question, one that assumes that Bob and his father are two distinct persons. When speaking about the relation between the Father and the Son, we usually mean this relationally. When I ask about the relation between the Father and YHWH, I mean this conceptually.

<sup>6</sup> When speaking about God, I prefer to use the term *deity*, rather than the more general term *divinity*, for I believe that a being can be divine (as in the case of angels), and not be God (deity).

<sup>7</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 111-112.

in reference to the Father, but in reference to the triune God, or to the nature of Deity, itself.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, depending on the century, the answer to the question, “Who is the God of Israel?” might be different. For the New Testament authors and early church fathers, it seems that the answer to that question was, “The Father.” To be sure, Jesus was also identified as YHWH by the New Testament authors, but in general, the term “God” is used by the church fathers to refer to the God of Israel and Jesus’s Father, whereas Jesus is typically identified as “Lord,” or other ways.<sup>9</sup> For the New Testament authors and early church fathers, then, YHWH is simply Jesus’s Father, the very God He spoke to, prayed to, and preached about.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as the doctrine of the Trinity developed, the answer to the question, “Who is the God of Israel?” went from, “the Father,” to “the triune God.” This is the position that more modern Christian theologians take, such as Karl Barth,<sup>11</sup> Millard Erickson,<sup>12</sup> and Walter Elwell,<sup>13</sup> all of whom identify YHWH as the triune God. Similarly, Catholic theologian Richard McBrien affirms that, the one God spoken

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>9</sup> This will be demonstrated in chapter three.

<sup>10</sup> To be sure, Jesus was also identified, in some sense, as YHWH, both in Scripture and in the early church fathers, a point that lies at the center of the Trinitarian problem that early church fathers sought to resolve, culminating in the Council of Nicaea. But, as a general rule, it was the Father who was most consistently called “God,” and God was, for the New Testament authors and early church fathers, the very same God of Israel; YHWH. As such, for the first few centuries, YHWH was simply considered to be the Father of Jesus, even though Jesus was also, in some sense, identified with YHWH, as explained above, and as will be explained more thoroughly throughout this dissertation.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, “YHWH the Triune God,” *Modern Theology*, 15, no. 1 (January 1999), 25-26, ISSN 0266-7177.

<sup>12</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 294, 309.

<sup>13</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 492-493.



of in the Old Testament (YHWH) is the very same God spoken of in the New Testament because, “For the Christian, there is only one God, and that one God is triune.”<sup>14</sup>

Both answers have their own problems, but very few theologians have taken the time to reflect on these problems, much less find a solution. For example, if the God of Israel is, indeed, the triune God, and the Father is the God of Israel, following the transitive principle of identity outlined above, this would mean that the Father is, Himself, the triune God, which is inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. As Hasker recognizes, “The Trinity is not identical with any one Person.”<sup>15</sup> However, if the God of Israel is not triune, and the Father is identified as the God of Israel, this would still create a problem with regard to the identity of Jesus, since He is *also* identified as YHWH in the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> In other words, if the Father is YHWH, and the Son is YHWH, then how do we avoid affirming that the Son is the Father? Here lies the central problem that will be attempted to be resolved throughout the course of this dissertation by focusing on the identity of the Father.

As has been seen, both answers can be problematic, and yet both answers seem to be correct. YHWH is, indeed, triune, and the Father is, indeed, YHWH. Yet, the Father is not triune. This leads to a problem of apparent internal incoherence and contradiction, which does not bode well for the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is my contention that, in simply assuming the identity of the Father, without taking the time to explain His relation to the God of Israel, Christians have essentially skipped a step in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. By “jumping over” the Father, in a sense, focusing almost exclusively on the Son and His relation to the

---

<sup>14</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 276.

<sup>15</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 205.

<sup>16</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 157, 160.

Father, the church has left the doctrine of the Trinity open to the claim of internal incoherence and contradiction, mentioned above. I believe that the solution to the problem of the Trinity raised by the identity of the Father can be solved by making a clear distinction between what is known as the “is” of identity, and the “is” of predication, which is what I propose to do in this dissertation.<sup>17</sup> As such, there are two ways in which we can say that the Father is YHWH, and by clarifying this distinction, the apparent contradiction can be avoided. In summary, then, the thesis that will be defended here is that applying the distinction between the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication to the doctrine of the Trinity can help clarify the identity of the Father in relation to YHWH and resolve any possible contradiction of identities. It will also be shown that the doctrine of the Trinity should be interpreted through the lens of divine identity, which can help bring even more clarity to the discussion.

### **Purpose and Methodology**

Although this has been alluded to, above, the question can nevertheless be asked: Hasn't this problem already been solved? In my experience, most people, upon hearing about the topic that is being discussed here, tend to respond with a puzzled look on their face, as though the question being asked has already been thoroughly answered for quite some time. Yet, most of the research and books written on the Trinity center on the Son (and, later, the Spirit), and His relation to the Father. Very little has been said about the Father, Himself, specifically His relation to YHWH and triunity. For example, in discussing the Trinity, Richard McBrien begins by affirming that God is one, and that the one God is triune.<sup>18</sup> When he begins to speak about the Father, however, he first states that He is the very God of the Old Testament (the very God he

---

<sup>17</sup> These terms will be defined, below.

<sup>18</sup> McBrien, *Catholicism*, 276.

has just said is triune), before affirming that this very God is the Father of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> If, then, one were to ask McBrien, “who is the Father?” he would presumably answer, “The very same God of Israel, the first Person of the Trinity; the Father of Christ.” But, if one were to ask him, “who is the God of Israel?” he would likely have to respond, “The very same God of Christianity; the triune God.” Both answers can be found in McBrien’s work. Asked and answered individually, there seems to be no problem. Taken together, however, what seems to be being affirmed, here, is that the God of Israel, who is triune, is the very Father of Christ, the first Person of the Trinity, which would entail that the Father is triune. This, of course, is not what the doctrine of the Trinity states, however, so how are these questions to be answered?

It is far easier to begin with the assumption that the Father is God, and then focus the discussion on the Son and His relation to the Father. So long as the discussion remains here, there is no real problem. This is precisely what has been done throughout most of church history, beginning with the New Testament in which the Father is clearly identified as the very same God of Israel.<sup>20</sup> Once the question is asked about the identity of the Father, and His relation to the God of Israel, however, the issue gets far more complex, as described above. It is in this discussion that the Father is identified in more ways than one, but done so without clear distinction, which creates confusion. One main purpose of this dissertation, then, is to help clarify these two ways of speaking about God, the Father, and YHWH, and in this way minimize,

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 282, 285.

<sup>20</sup> John 4:23-24, for example, speaks of “the Father” and “God” interchangeably. Whenever the Father is mentioned by Jesus in the Gospels, in fact, He is always talking about the God of Israel. At the very least, this is how the original audience would have understood Him. This identification between God and the Father, although much more personal in the New Testament, and different in the case of the Son, is also found in the Old Testament, on a basic level. Deut. 32:6, for example, calls God “Father” in virtue of His being the Creator of the Universe. Similarly, God is viewed as the Father of Israel (Isaiah 63:16), of Creation (Malachi 2:10), of kings (2 Samuel 7:14), and of the Messiah (Psalms 2:7). Throughout the first three hundred years of church history, this was the most common use of the term “Father,” namely as referring to the God of Israel.

if not eliminate, confusion about the identity of the Father. There is a clear gap in research on this subject, centering on the Father, which this dissertation hopes to fill. It seems clear that the answer to the question, “Who is the Father?” has not been answered satisfactorily. Instead, His identity as the God of Israel has simply been an underlying assumption that allows for a deeper discussion of the Son and the Spirit, and their relation to the Father, but leaves the doctrine of the Trinity vulnerable to the claim of incoherence and contradiction.

Another purpose of this dissertation is to offer a new way look at, and speak about, the Trinity, which hopefully brings about even further clarity. This is where the discussion about the “is” of identity and predication will play a significant role. However, although new, in one sense, throughout the dissertation I hope to show that this is how Christians have been speaking about God since very early on, likely without realizing it. Hasker points out, for example, that there are three main uses of the word “God,” namely, in reference to the God of the Old Testament, in reference to each of the trinitarian Persons, and in reference to the Trinity, as a whole.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the early church fathers spoke about God in multiple ways, changing between them without making these shifts explicit. Tertullian, for example, begins one of his discussions on the Trinity by outlining the divine attributes such as eternity and transcendence.<sup>22</sup> He then shifts to speaking about the God of Israel, who Himself holds these attributes. In doing so, Tertullian is speaking about God in terms of the divine attributes, but also as a specific Being who holds these attributes. This corresponds to the “is” of predication and identity, respectively. Other early church fathers such as Origen, Irenaeus, and Athanasius, similarly speak about God in these

---

<sup>21</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 246-249.

<sup>22</sup> Quintus Tertullian, “To the Nations,” *Early Church Theology* (Fig, 2012), I:II-IV.

ways. As such, this dissertation makes these forms of speaking about God explicit, rather than implicit, and as such can help clarify the doctrine of the Trinity a bit more.

One final purpose of this dissertation is to help bring more attention to the Father, who has been largely neglected for far too long. The Old Testament talks about God, as Father, at least fourteen times, whereas the New Testament mentions the Father around 240 times.<sup>23</sup> None of these estimates includes indirect references to God as Father, such as references to children of God, or the Son of God, or descriptions of God in affective terminology that reflects a Father/Son relationship; they only include those passages that explicitly call God “Father.” Most of these references to the Father come from Jesus, Himself, in the Gospels. Similarly, although the emphasis in discussing the doctrine of the Trinity has been on the Son, this has always been done so through the lens of His relationship with the Father. For the early church fathers, it was essential to maintain the priority and unity of God, the Father, when discussing the Trinity, sometimes at the cost of the deity and equality of the Son and the Spirit. As such, although I have argued here that the identity of the Father has been largely ignored in the discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity, this does not mean that the Father, Himself, has been ignored. The discussion has simply centered on His relation to the Son and the Holy Spirit, but rarely, if ever, on His relation to YHWH.

Today, however, it seems that the emphasis within the church is so much on the Son (understandably), that the Father is rarely mentioned, except in relation to Jesus. Some have argued that, without the Incarnation, there would be no discussion of the Trinity. This may be true. However, the church should remember that it is the Father who sent the Son in the first place (Jn. 6:44), to whom Jesus tells His disciples to pray (Lk. 11:2), whose will Jesus came to

---

<sup>23</sup> These numbers are my own estimates, using multiple Concordances and counting each passage individually.

carry out (Jn. 5:30), and for whose glory everything should be done (1 Cor. 10:31).<sup>24</sup> In focusing the discussion on the identity of the Father, and His relation to the God of Israel, I hope to help remind the church of the centrality of the Father within the Christian faith, within Scripture, and within the doctrine of the Trinity. In summary, then, the purpose of this dissertation is threefold. First, to clarify the identity of the Father in relation to the God of Israel. Second, to offer a new way to look at, and speak about, the Trinity, applying the “is” of identity and predication to the doctrine of the Trinity. Third, to place the Father back at the forefront of discussion within the church, especially when discussing the Trinity. In doing so, I hope to formulate a clearer expression of the doctrine of the Trinity that harmonizes with Scripture and orthodox Christian doctrine, while avoiding the problem of internal incoherence and logical contradiction.

How might this task be accomplished? Before moving on to the methodology, it is important to recognize that the Trinity is, and will always be, one of the greatest mysteries of God. I have not convinced myself of any delusion that, somehow, I have discovered and resolved all the wonders and mysteries of the Trinity, and that I will put the topic to rest, once and for all, through this dissertation. The goal of this dissertation is not to arrogantly take on such a task, but to move the discussion forward, and add to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, building off of what has come before. With that in mind, I intend on carrying out the task that I have set before me in three steps.

First, I will begin with Scripture, taking a look at all of the major passages that speak about the Father, in the hopes of identifying some sort of pattern that may reflect the different uses of the title. While it might make sense, philosophically, to speak about God in two different ways (such as with the “is” of identity and predication), this would ultimately be meaningless if

---

<sup>24</sup> All cited passages are NIV, unless otherwise noted.

no support for such a notion of identity can be found in Scripture. To be sure, the biblical authors did not have in mind this philosophical notion of identity that will be used in this dissertation. However, it may be the case that their language may have been guided by the Holy Spirit in such a way as to allow for this notion of identity to be harmonized with Scripture. For example, there is no way that David could have known that, in writing down the words, “The LORD says to my Lord” (Psalms 110:1), he was speaking of Jesus Christ (although he might have known that he was speaking about the Messiah). More to the point, he likely would have never imagined that these words might be used as evidence for the Trinity, today. Yet, if the doctrine of the Trinity is true, then it must be able to harmonize with the teachings and words of Scripture. As such, although David was not consciously speaking about the Trinity, his words nevertheless reflect, or at least allow, for the doctrine of the Trinity. In much the same way, although the biblical authors did not have the philosophical notion of identity and predication in mind when speaking about God, if this notion is correct, then the words of Scripture should reflect, or at least allow for, this notion of identity. This is not to say that we should anachronistically read back into Scripture modern notions of identity, as though this is what the biblical authors taught. Rather, what is being proposed here is that, on some level, this notion of identity is reflected in, or at least allowed by, Scripture, and as such there is no reason to reject it, a priori.

Having identified the possible pattern in speaking about God and the Father in Scripture, the same task will be carried out with the early church fathers. Here is where the first limit of this dissertation needs to be mentioned. In this section, only those church fathers that were directly influential in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity will be looked at, and no heretical views of the Trinity will be analyzed in any significant manner. This dissertation affirms the truth of the generally accepted orthodox formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, as expressed

in the Nicene Creed, and later developed further in the so-called Athanasian Creed. As such, the major church fathers that will be discussed, here, are Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, the Cappadocian Fathers, Athanasius, and Augustine. Origen and Tertullian represent the earliest development of the doctrine of the Trinity, up until the third century, whereas the Cappadocian Fathers, Athanasius and Augustine represent the later development. As such, these church fathers represent a relatively complete picture of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is held today. What I hope to establish, here, is the same as I hope to establish in my survey of Scripture, namely that the writings of the early church fathers offer a specific view of the Father that, at the very least, allows for the notion of divine identity that will be presented, here, and help bring clarity to the doctrine of the Trinity.

If Scripture, and the early church fathers, at the very least allow for the use and of the philosophical notion of identity being proposed here when speaking about God, then we can move on to the third aspect of the methodology, namely application. In this section, I intend on showing how the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication can help to clarify the identity of the Father, in relation to the God of Israel. For this, I will be relying significantly on the works of William Hasker, Thomas D. Senior, and Richard Bauckham. It will be shown that there are two senses in which the Father can be YHWH, and the same applies to the Son and the Spirit. By making these two senses more explicit when speaking about the Trinity, the orthodox affirmation that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, can be maintained, while avoiding any possible incoherence such as the claim that the Father is the Son. At the end of this research, exegesis, and analysis, I hope to have shown that the Father is, indeed, YHWH, as the New Testament and the early church fathers affirmed, while at the same time clarifying what this “is” actually means. What I am proposing here is new, in one sense, but not novel, for it will be



shown that the biblical authors and the early church fathers were already speaking in a way that is very similar to the notion of identity being proposed here. In this way, this dissertation hopes to add something new to the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, while avoiding the fear of novelty that many have when it comes to historical Christian doctrines.

### **Key Terms and Concepts**

One of the key issues in this dissertation topic is how to talk about the Trinity. I have contended, thus far, that one of the reasons for confusion regarding the Persons of the Trinity is the lack of clarity when talking about God, the Father, or even YHWH. As such, it is of extreme importance to make sure that the terms and concepts presented throughout are, themselves, clear. With this purpose in mind, this section will seek to provide certain definitions and explanations of key terms and concepts that will be prevalent throughout the rest of the dissertation, focusing specifically on how I will be using these terms, rather than on general definitions.

#### **God**

It seems that this should be the simplest term to understand, given the Christian context in which this dissertation is being written. However, there are two main ways in which I will be speaking about God, throughout, and I hope to maintain clarity and consistency in each of these uses. The first usage of *God* is what some like to call, the God of the philosophers. In a sense, this is the Anselmian God, namely, “That than which nothing greater is conceivable.”<sup>25</sup> To be sure, this concept of God, known as “perfect being theology,” predates Anselm, but his specific formulation is especially useful due to its simplicity. Another way to describe this concept of God is that this is the God of general theism, namely the Supreme Being, the eternal Creator of

---

<sup>25</sup> Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 501.

the Universe, who has all of the great-making properties such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence. These are the attributes that constitute *Deity*, independent of whether this Being exists, or not. In his discussion on the Trinity, Tertullian begins by saying that he will try to demonstrate that the false gods of “the heathens” are not truly gods, precisely because they lack these divine attributes.<sup>26</sup> The attribute Tertullian emphasizes most is eternity, for this means that God cannot be a creature, nor part of Creation, and also entails that He is immaterial.<sup>27</sup> Other attributes mentioned by Tertullian are divine immutability, omnipresence, omnipotence, and being worthy of worship.

Similarly, J. N D. Kelly catalogues some of the church fathers’ definitions of God, such as Clement (God is Father and almighty Creator of the entire cosmos),<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus (God the Father is increate, unengendered, invisible, one and only Deity, and creator of the universe),<sup>29</sup> Origen (who emphasizes God’s eternity and being the source of all existence),<sup>30</sup> and Tertullian (which I have already mentioned, above). In the same vein, William Hasker often speaks of the divine nature that constitutes Deity, never quite defining it, exactly, but offering the following properties as part of that divine nature: omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, moral perfection, eternity, “and whatever else needs to be included in the full package of divine attributes.”<sup>31</sup> The so-called Athanasian Creed, which represents the culmination of early church

---

<sup>26</sup> Tertullian, *To the Nations*, II:I.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* II:II.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 83.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-154.

<sup>31</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 247.

development of the doctrine of the Trinity, similarly contains a non-exhaustive list of the divine attributes, very similar to the ones mentioned above.<sup>32</sup> This general concept of God will be essential in understanding the *is* of predication, described below.

The second way in which the word *God* will be used is in reference to the Christian God, as revealed in Scripture, but especially through Jesus Christ. This is the God of Israel, the God of Jesus, the triune God that all orthodox Christians affirm. Of course, this description seems to presuppose that the God of Israel is triune, a point that has yet to be explored. For now, what is important to note is that *God*, in this sense, refers to an actual Being who contains the attributes mentioned above. One way to describe this conception of God is to say that there is such a thing as an “office of Deity,” which includes all the divine attributes that are necessary for any Being to be God. This office may or may not be held by any particular Being, but we can nevertheless speak about the attributes that any Being *must* hold, in order to be God. Christians, however, affirm that there *is* such a Being that holds the office of Deity, and that this Being (God) has revealed Himself in Scripture. In this sense, the God of Scripture is *God*, and *God* is the God of Scripture. This God has revealed Himself as, among other things, triune. As such, *trinity* is part of the identity of the Christian God. This last statement requires more clarification, which will be done in a later part of the dissertation, for it is not entirely clear whether *trinity* can be properly classified as a divine attribute essential for Deity, or as part of the identity of the God that holds this office of Deity. This is not to say that divine attributes and divine identity are at odds, with one another. In fact, it will later be argued that identity and nature (divine attributes) are inseparable. However, for the purposes of discussion and clarification, it is useful to make this distinction, similar to how theologians typically separate discussion about the oneness of God,

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 250-251.

and the three-ness of God, although both are, ultimately, inseparable. This leads to the next terms that need to be explained.

### Nature and Identity of God

One of the most important concepts that will be prevalent throughout this dissertation is the distinction between the nature and identity of God. As noted above, in God there is no such distinction, for, although not identical, both are intimately related to one another. For, the purposes of this dissertation, however, it is helpful to separate these two categories for clarity of thought. As such, when discussing the nature of God, I am speaking of the divine attributes, described above. As stated by Elmer Towns, “God’s nature is what He is, and if we could take away God’s nature, it would eliminate His existence. God’s nature is His being and without it He would not be God.”<sup>33</sup> Whatever attribute is essential for the office of Deity will be referred to, here, as the nature of God. However, since we are not speaking about some hypothetical, general conception of God, we are also not talking about some general attributes that constitute Deity. The God that is being discussed, here, is the God of Israel. As such, when discussing the nature of God, we are discussing the nature of this, specific God, namely the God of Israel, as evidenced throughout Scripture through His interaction with Israel and the rest of reality. The discussion on God’s nature, then, will necessarily be grounded in Scripture.

This is important when discussing such attributes as omnipotence, for example. Omnipotence literally means “all-powerful,” which some take to mean that God can literally do *anything*, and this brings about some problematic philosophical issues as to the coherence of such an attribute, and its interaction with other attributes. Scripture, however, helps properly

---

<sup>33</sup> Towns, *Theology for Today*, 98.

delimit and clarify this concept. For example, Hebrews 6:18 says that “it is impossible for God to lie,” and 2 Timothy 2:13 states that “he cannot deny himself.” In other words, God cannot stop being God, and as such His omnipotence is properly limited to His own, good, nature. God cannot, for example, choose to torture a child for fun, not because He is not omnipotent, but because He is omnibenevolent, which qualifies His omnipotence. This view of omnipotence has philosophical value, as when discussing issues such as the omnipotence paradox.<sup>34</sup> For this reason, as mentioned above, discussion about the nature of God throughout this dissertation will be grounded in Scripture, referring to the God of Israel, moving beyond the attributes of general theism. The nature of God can be better understood when compared to His identity, however, in the sense that it will be used, here.

God’s identity, although intimately and inseparably tied to His divine attributes (or nature), goes beyond the divine attributes, pointing to who God is, rather than simply *what* He is. As mentioned above, there is a specific Being who holds the divine nature. In fact, according to Scripture, there is only *one* Being who holds these attributes, namely the God of Israel. However, whereas modern discussions about God seem to center more on His nature, according to Richard Bauckham, in Jewish theology, “the essence and nature of God are not the primary categories...but rather it is identity.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, Israel identified God, not through His nature, but by His identity. For the Jewish people, this identity is expressed in His unique relationship to Israel and to all reality.<sup>36</sup> With regard to Israel, God is the One who chose them as His people, brought them out of Egypt, gave them His Law, etc. Regarding reality, He is the

---

<sup>34</sup> The omnipotence paradox asks the question, “Can God create a stone so heavy that He cannot lift?”

<sup>35</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), Kindle Ed., loc. 19.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 129.

Creator and Ruler of all that exists. This one God is identified as YHWH, which, according to Bauckham, “names the unique identity of God.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, the nature of God concerns *what* God is, whereas the identity of God concerns *who* God is.

### The “Is” of Identity and Predication

Considering that this is the main proposition at the core of this dissertation, properly defining these key concepts is perhaps the most essential task of this section. Yet, at the same time, precisely because of its significance, most of what needs to be said about it will be reserved for later, when this notion of identity will be applied to the doctrine of the Trinity. The best way to explain this concept would be with an example. Consider the sentence, “Jesus is God.” The question could be asked, in what sense is Jesus, God? Two possible answers will be considered, here, namely in the sense of identity, and in the sense of predication. According to Thomas Senor, the “is” of identity means “is the same as.”<sup>38</sup> This is also the view that Hasker takes when he says that, to say that “The Father is God” is to say that “The Father is identical with God.”<sup>39</sup> Now, depending on what is meant by “God,” the very meaning of “The Father is identical with God” will change. For now, let’s take the second meaning of *God*, described above, namely the specific Being revealed in Scripture as the God of Israel; that is, YHWH.

Now, consider the statement, “Jesus is God.” If the God that is being referred to, here, is the God of Israel, and if the “is: in this statement about Jesus is the “is” of identity, then what is being said is that Jesus is identical to the God of Israel. It is not that Jesus is *a* god, in the sense of general theism. Rather, to say that Jesus is God, using the “is” of identity, is to say that He is

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Senor, “The Incarnation and the Trinity,” 240.

<sup>39</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 186.

*that* specific God, namely YHWH. Jesus *just is* that God. This interpretation is especially problematic, however, for if Jesus is God, in this sense, and the Father is also God, in this sense, how is it that the Father is not identical to the Son? Furthermore, if the God of Israel is triune, as most Christians seem to affirm, today, and Jesus is identical to the triune God, then how is it that Jesus is not, Himself, triune? If the *is* in the statement “Jesus is God” is interpreted as the “is” of identity, there does not seem to be a way to avoid these heretical conclusions. However, there is a second type of “is” that can apply to the above statement (Jesus is God), namely the “is” of predication. This second type of “is” corresponds best with the first usage of *God*, described above, namely the office of Deity. In this second sense, to say that “Jesus is God” is to say that Jesus has the very same divine attributes that are both sufficient and necessary for being God. This, too, has its problems, one of which is that, if the Father and the Son and the Spirit are all God, in this latter sense, how do we avoid the charge of tri-theism? This objection will be discussed in a later chapter, but it does not seem to be unresolvable, given the biblical view of the oneness of God. For now, it is important to note that these are the two senses of “is” that will be applied to doctrine of the Trinity in this dissertation in an attempt to clarify the Father’s relation to the God of Israel.

### Some Final Presuppositions

It is very important to highlight the fact that, throughout this entire dissertation, the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity will not be demonstrated, but rather assumed. This does not mean that the main thesis statement is unfalsifiable, for it could very well be shown to ultimately not work or be applicable to the doctrine of the Trinity. This does not even mean that, throughout the dissertation, the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be challenged, at all. This is, in fact, one of my biggest concerns when entering this topic, namely facing the possibility of discovering that the

doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately incoherent, and therefore, likely false. However, its truth has been assumed, which means that the long-discussed debates concerning the Deity of Christ, the Arian Controversy, or even the Personhood of the Holy Spirit, will not be discussed, nor defended, here. It will be assumed that the New Testament writers and early church fathers, as well as the countless theologians who have come before, have done their due diligence in studying Scripture and showing how God has, indeed, revealed Himself to be triune.

As such, the main formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity that will be affirmed, here, is reflected in the Athanasian Creed. As stated by this Creed, “The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; yet they are not three gods but one God...And in this Trinity there is no before or after, no greater or lesser, but all three persons are equally eternal with each other and fully equal.”<sup>40</sup> It is within this framework that the notion of identity proposed here will be applied, in hopes to clarify these statements a bit more, avoiding apparent contradictions, especially as they relate to the identity of the Father in relation to YHWH. Furthermore, the truth and divine inspiration of Scripture is also affirmed and assumed, which means that to simply say that the New Testament authors, and consequently the church fathers, simply got it wrong when it comes to the Trinity, is not an option. Anything that is being proposed, here, must be in full harmony with the teachings of Scripture, and what has traditionally been considered “orthodox Christianity.”<sup>41</sup> Complete novelty will be avoided, while at the same time attempting to add something new to the scholarly discussion.

---

<sup>40</sup> As cited by Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 250.

<sup>41</sup> What is considered orthodox can vary from denomination to denomination, of course. The Christianity that is being affirmed, here, falls more in line with what C. S. Lewis calls a “mere Christianity.” The basic tenets of the Christian faith, supported by a majority of Christians and church fathers, grounded in the teachings of Scripture.



## Outline of Chapters

Having discussed and defined some key terms and concepts, an outline and summary of the chapters will be helpful in offering a clearer idea of what this dissertation is aiming to accomplish, and how. There is a sense in which this dissertation will be a deconstruction and reconstruction of the doctrine of the Trinity, following the theological development of this doctrine throughout Scripture and the early church fathers, seeking to apply the notion of identity described above at key points in this development, to help clarify the issue. Chapter two will begin by looking into the Father, as He is described throughout Scripture, and later in other second-temple Jewish literature. As will be seen, there is some development between the two testaments, with the New Testament taking a much more personal view of God, as Father, than the Old Testament. There is some development between the Gospels and the Epistles, as well, the latter being more emphatic in identifying Jesus with the God of Israel.

After surveying the title of “Father,” as applied to God, throughout Scripture and second-temple literature, the same will be done with the writings of the early church fathers. As will be seen, there is a clear development in the church fathers regarding their conception of the Father, with a somewhat definitive moment in which He is explicitly identified as the first Person of the Trinity. It is in this discussion of the early church fathers that the problem of the identity of the Father, and His relation to the God of Israel, will be most apparent, and as such, the “is” of identity and predication will begin to be applied. It will be shown how the early church fathers seem to have naturally spoken about God in at least two senses, and how the “is” of identity and predication can help make these two senses more explicit, and in doing so bring about some clarity. In essence, this chapter will be looking at the foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity, the rise of the Trinitarian “problem,” and how the respective authors sought to express and

possibly resolve this problem.<sup>42</sup> In doing so, a preliminary answer to the question, “Who is the Father?” will be offered but will continue to be developed in later chapters.

Chapter three will begin discussing more thoroughly the identity of the Father, this time through the lens of Richard Bauckham’s notion of divine identity. As will be seen, it is Bauckham’s contention that this notion of divine identity is how second-temple Jews viewed and described YHWH, and as such forms the theological foundation for the New Testament’s teachings on God. This is especially true of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, as will be seen through what I call the Pauline Pattern and his reformulation of the Shema. This notion of divine identity, along with the Pauline Pattern, will prove useful in understanding how the early church fathers spoke about the Father and the Son, and as such will offer some clarity as to how they understood the doctrine of the Trinity. At the end of this chapter, the answer offered in the previous chapter to the question, “Who is the Father?” will be expanded upon and clarified. Yet, it will be seen that, even with this notion of divine identity, this answer will be incomplete.

Chapter four will build upon the notion of divine identity developed in the previous chapter, showing how this identity relates to God’s nature. It will be made clear that the reason that the previous answer was incomplete was because it did not the idea of God’s nature which was so central to trinitarian discussions throughout the first four centuries. This chapter will ask whether God even has a nature, and if answered in the affirmative, the discussion will move on to defining this nature (God’s essential attributes). When this is completed, it will be made clear that the claim, “The Father is YHWH,” which is the answer offered at the end of the second chapter to the question about the identity of the Father, can be understood in two ways. These

---

<sup>42</sup> The “problem” being mentioned, here, refers to the clear affirmation that Jesus is God, and how to explain His relation to the Father.

two ways correspond to the “is” of identity and predication, which will be further defined in this chapter. After all of this has been established, the end of the chapter will seek to place all of these pieces together, much like a puzzle, seeking to offer a robust answer to the question, “Who is the Father?” that incorporates all of the distinct elements discussed throughout the previous chapters.

At the end of this chapter, various objections will be discussed and responded to. As will be seen, one such potential objection involves the name of God, YHWH, and its application throughout Scripture as the unique identity of God. Can the notion of identity proposed, here, also be applied to the name of God? Or does the personal name of God show that there is only one sense in which the Father can be YHWH? This will lead into a discussion on the very notion of *names* in the Bible, second-temple Judaism, and early Christianity. What I hope to show, here, is that the name of God, although personal and uniquely His, is so closely linked to His nature that the same notion of identity applied to “God” and “Father” in the previous chapters can, indeed, apply to the divine name. Further objections will also be discussed, before offering a final synthesis and practical application of everything that has been developed, throughout. Chapter five will summarize all my findings throughout this research, clarify the main implications of each chapter, discuss some further objections, and conclude with some considerations for future research to further develop the ideas presented, here. By the end, it is hoped to have clarified the major questions and problems described in this chapter, continuing to affirm orthodox trinitarian doctrine, while doing so with some more clarity.

## CHAPTER 2: THE FATHER IN SCRIPTURE AND EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

### Introduction

As explained in the first chapter, the central issue being discussed, here, is the identity of the Father, and His relation to the God of Israel. If YHWH is triune, then the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, cannot be YHWH in the fullest sense,<sup>43</sup> for the Trinity is not identical with any one Person.<sup>44</sup> However, if YHWH can be properly identified as the Father meaning that YHWH is *not* triune, then the problem becomes how the Son, or the Spirit, can also be YHWH, yet not be the Father. The first issue that needs to be resolved, then, is, whether Scripture identifies the Father as YHWH, and if so, in what sense? For this, the following chapter will be looking at some of the major, relevant, passages that directly speak about the Father, whether in relation to YHWH, or as the first Person of the Trinity, or both. Related passages that use the titles “God” and “Lord,” will also be looked at to offer more clarity as to how Scripture identifies the Father. Having established some sort of pattern, which I will argue begins most notably with Paul, some of the major writings of the early church fathers, until the fourth century, will also be analyzed with this same purpose, in mind.

What I intend to show is that the Pauline pattern of identifying the Father with the title “God,” and the Son with the title “Lord,” can be used to clarify the church fathers’ usage of these titles. As such, the thesis that will be developed and defended, here, is that, both in Scripture and in the writings of the early church fathers, the Father is generally identified as YHWH, the God

---

<sup>43</sup> What I mean by “the fullest sense” is that the Father *just is* YHWH. The “is” that is being used, here, is the “is” of identity, in which case the Father is identical to YHWH, meaning that He has all of the attributes that YHWH has. In other words, they are the same Being, which would make the Father, triune. A case will be made, in a later chapter, that triunity can be seen, not as an essential attribute of YHWH, but rather as part of His identity as the God of Israel. If this is the case, then the Father *can* be rightly said to be YHWH using the “is” of identity.

<sup>44</sup> William Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 205.

of Israel (whom Paul usually calls “God”), whereas Jesus is His Son (whom Paul usually calls “Lord”). To be sure, Jesus is also identified with YHWH, a point that will need to be discussed later. However, my main contention is that, at least until the fourth century, Christians (as exemplified through Scripture and the early church fathers) did not view YHWH as the triune God. Rather, it seems clear that the primary view was that YHWH was Jesus’s Father, whom we also call *the* Father (the first Person of the Trinity). As such, attempting to explain how the Father can be YHWH, and, yet Jesus also be identified with YHWH, was the central issue in trinitarian discussions up until at least the fourth century. The first step in attempting to clarify these relationships, then, will be to establish how Scripture views the Father, which is where we will begin.

### **The Father in the Old Testament**

For the purposes of this survey, only those passages that specifically reference the Father as *Father* will be discussed. This survey will not be exhaustive, even of the relevant passages, however. Rather, I have attempted to list and discuss enough representative passages to establish how Scripture views the Father, while also making sure to not be deceitful in choosing only those passages that align with my thesis. To the best of my abilities, I have read and analyzed all relevant passages, and this survey represents the conclusions of that process. As will be seen, there is a significant difference in how the Old Testament speaks about the Father, as compared with how the New Testament speaks about Him. There are differences within the New Testament itself, as well, but this will be discussed below. In general, however, the following pattern emerges: The Old Testament describes God’s identity as Father through His relationship with Israel, whereas the New Testament describes His identity as Father through His relationship with Jesus and His followers. Furthermore, the Gospels make a clear distinction between Jesus’s

relation to the Father, and believers' relation to the Father. Lastly, Paul establishes a pattern when speaking about both the Father and the Son, using the titles "God" and "Lord," respectively. With these preliminary conclusions in mind, we will begin with the Old Testament survey.

### The Father's Relation to Israel

This first category of passages that speak about the Father begins with Deuteronomy 32:6, which states, "Is this how you repay the LORD, you foolish, unwise people? Is he not your father, your creator? He has made you and established you." This is the first time God is called *Father* in the Old Testament, and the passage focuses on God's relationship with Israel (her Creator), and how Israel is supposed to respond to this relationship (faithfulness). This association between God as Creator and God as Father is, perhaps, the most common association made in the Old Testament. However, Jewish scholars Rashi and Rashbam agree that the Hebrew words for "create" and "establish" refer to God's choosing, acquiring, or redeeming Israel from the slavery of Egypt, rather than actual creation.<sup>45</sup> As such, God is not *Father* in a general sense, as in He created the Universe. Rather, He is *Israel's* Father, having redeemed her from the bondage of slavery. Jewish scholar Nahmanides disagrees with this interpretation, somewhat, stating that, "The Hebrew verb generally means 'acquire,' but one can acquire something by bringing it forth from nonexistence into existence, as He did to you."<sup>46</sup> He goes on to cite Proverbs 8:22 and Genesis 14:19 as evidence of this. Since these commentaries are directed at the Jewish people, however, this bringing forth from nonexistence into existence could refer to

---

<sup>45</sup> Michael Carasik, ed., *Deuteronomy: The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedelot* (Phi: Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 218.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

God's choosing and forming the nation of Israel from within the world, rather than actual, ex-nihilo creation as is described in Genesis 1. This is IBN Ezra's interpretation, stating that these verbs mean "Made you, not in the sense of 'created' from nothing but in the sense of fashioning into completed form."<sup>47</sup>

The above interpretations may guide the interpretation of similar passages in which God is described as the Father of Israel, citing His creative act (Isaiah 64:8; Malachi 2:10), His protection (Isaiah 63:16), His choosing of Israel (Jeremiah 31:9), and the expectation of faithfulness from His children (Jeremiah 3:4, 19; Malachi 1:6). As can be seen, just over half (eight of fourteen) of the passages in the Old Testament that speak about God as *Father* center on His specific relationship with Israel, specifically His acts of creation, choosing, and redeeming. Only twice, however (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8), does any author or biblical figure directly speak to God, calling Him "our father," or a similar expression. This, together with the relatively few total passages that use this title, at all, shows that, although God *was* viewed by Jews as a Father, it was not a common way to refer to God. Most of these passages lack a personal sentiment, similar to how a son speaks to or about his human father. In other words, it does not seem likely that the Old Testament authors viewed God as *Father* in terms of who He is, but rather in terms of what He does or has done. This is consistent with the Jewish view of divine identity that will be discussed in a later chapter.

#### The Father and His Messiah

There are four passages that use similar language and follow a similar theme, namely that of kingship. In 2 Samuel 7, David expresses his desire to build a house/temple for God, but God

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

does not allow him. In response to David's desire, God, instead, promises David that He will build *him* a house that will endure forever (vv. 13-16). God confirms that, although David will not build God's temple, his descendent will, saying that "I will be become his father and he will become my son" (v. 14). As explained by Daniel Hays, the author of 2 Samuel is building on a certain wordplay within the Hebrew word for "house," in which David's proposal to build God a "temple/house," is contrasted with God's promise to establish an eternal Davidic "dynasty/house."<sup>48</sup> It is tempting to interpret this passage as Messianic, given other Messianic passages that use similar language, such as Psalms 2:7. However, God mentions His "son's" future sins, promising that, even though he sins, "My loyal love will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul" (v. 15). Interestingly, the parallel passage to this verse (11 Chronicles 17:13) does not include this latter part about sin. Nevertheless, 2 Samuel does include it, and as such cannot be speaking about the Messiah, for the Messiah was to be sinless. Nevertheless, while not specifically speaking about the Messiah, the promise of David's "house" to endure "forever" does find its ultimate completion in Jesus, and as such, is, in a sense, Messianic.<sup>49</sup>

This Messianic theme of kingship is also found in Psalms 2:7, in which God, seemingly speaking to the Messiah, says, "You are my son; today I have become your father." The Messianic interpretation of certain Psalms predates the Christian era, although the practice is much more common in the New Testament and early church fathers.<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that this sort of father/son language was common in the ancient Near East when describing "the

---

<sup>48</sup> J. Daniel Hays, "1-2 Samuel," *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013), 211.

<sup>49</sup> Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 211.

<sup>50</sup> Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 83-85.



relationship between a great king and one of his subject kings, who ruled by his authority and owed him allegiance.”<sup>51</sup> However, it should also be noted that this passage is cited and alluded to in the New Testament in reference to Jesus Christ (Ac. 13:33; Heb. 1:5; Heb. 5:5). As such, these passages seem to indicate a more personal, father/son relationship between God and His Messiah, distinguished from God’s relationship with Israel, both in language and style, focusing on the nature of the relationship, rather than on God’s specific actions.

There is one passage that stands out from the rest, and yet nevertheless seems to fall under this same category. Isaiah 9:6, speaking about the Messiah, states, “And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The passage falls under the category being discussed here because it is Messianic, involves some sort of kingship (the reference to government and the use of the title “Prince of Peace), and uses the title “Father.” Yet, it is different from the passages discussed, thus far, for it is not talking specifically about God, although the titles seem to indicate that this Person can be no other than God, and as such is not talking about the Father, as Christians understand the term (the first Person of the Trinity). This is the only passage in the entire Bible in which the Messiah is called Father, which initially seems to be very problematic for Christian trinitarian theology, for the Father cannot be the Son, and the Son is not the Father. However, as has been shown, thus far, the Old Testament view of God as *Father* revolves primarily around His relationship to Israel, His actions, and His relationship with His Messiah.

God’s identity, in the Old Testament, was less about His nature, and more about His actions in history, a point that will be discussed further, in later chapters. As such, it is important to read this passage in light of these descriptions, and not in light of trinitarian theology. When

---

<sup>51</sup> John H. Stek and Wilber B. Wallis, *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 781.

this is done, it is evident that the Messiah is being called Father, here, not because He is *the* Father, rather because He will have a similar relationship to Israel, and to the world, that YHWH has, namely through creating, choosing, and redeeming His people. It is in this sense, and *only* in this sense, that the Messiah can be called *Father*, as He can be called *Creator, Savior, God*, and other titles that only belong to God. The Son can, then, in a sense, be called our Father, but only in respect to His role in Creation, Redemption, and His care for His people. In other words, He is like a Father (actions), but He is not *the* Father (identity or nature). This can be confusing, which is why, as per trinitarian theology, it is preferable to call Him the Son.

The above passages point to the primary identification of God as *Father*, His relationship with Israel and His Messiah. There does not seem to be a view of God as *Father* in a general sense (as in the Father of all human beings), although this can be extrapolated by stating, for example, that if God is a Father to Israel because He chose/created her, then since God created the entire Universe, He is also Father to all. This is not the main contention of the Old Testament, however, and the New Testament needs to be brought into the discussion to establish this point, further. However, one passage does stand out from the rest, speaking in a much more general sense, rather than specifically toward Israel or the Messiah. Psalms 68:5 states, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.” As mentioned, this passage is not specifically addressing Israel or the Messiah but is addressing all who are fatherless or widows. The idea is that God is Father to all who are suffering, in some way, by taking care of them, protecting them, blessing them, and so on. This aligns with Isaiah 63:16 that calls God “our protector from ancient times.” The Isaiah passage is specifically speaking about Israel, however, but together with Psalms 68, and other passages, can be applied to all people. Nevertheless, although different in this respect, Psalms 68 confirms that which has been

demonstrated in this survey, thus far, namely that, in the Old Testament, God's identity as *Father* is shown through His actions, whether it be toward Israel, the Messiah, or the world. God's actions show God to be a Father, and rarely is the title used in a personal way ("our Father," for example). God is, indeed, "our Father," but rarely is He addressed in such a personal way. Usually, the title is used to emphasize God's actions and Israel's expected response to His actions. Only in the case of God's relationship with the Messiah is the title ever used to describe God, without any emphasis on His actions.

### **The Father in Second-Temple Jewish Literature**

There can be no doubt that the God that is being called *Father*, in the Old Testament, is the very God of Israel, namely YHWH. Israel knew no other God, and even though it is possible to interpret certain Old Testament passages in trinitarian ways (such as passages referencing the Angel of the LORD), the Old Testament authors, themselves, did not have this view in mind when calling God, *Father*. Furthermore, many of these *Father* passages specifically reference Him as the very same God who brought Israel out of Egypt, created the world, spoke to Moses, Abraham, and the other patriarchs, and, at times, is distinguished from the Messiah, whom Christians identify as Jesus, God's Son. As such, once again, there can be no doubt that the very Being that is being called *Father*, in the Old Testament, is YHWH, the God of Israel.

This view of God as *Father* can also be seen in other second-temple Jewish literature, up until the second century. While the most common designation for God in many of these writings is *Lord*, He is called *Father*, at times, as well. For example, the second-century B.C. book of Tobit states that, "He is Lord, and God is our Father forever."<sup>52</sup> This is the only time God is

---

<sup>52</sup> "Tobit 13:4," *The Complete Apocrypha* (Covenant Press, 2018), 15.

called *Father* in the book of Tobit, and the context suggests that He is Israel's Father because He is their Lord and King. Similarly, the Wisdom of Solomon calls Israel God's "sons," referencing the strength, sovereignty, and the judgment of God, and the fact that He created them.<sup>53</sup> In fact, in the apocrypha and intertestamental literature, God's sovereignty, lordship, and creative power are the three main reasons for calling God *Father*.<sup>54</sup> There is one notable exception to these "Father passages" in the second-temple literature, namely the second chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon, in which "the righteous man" seems to have a special relationship with God, distinct from the rest of Israel, stating that, "He [the righteous man] boasts that God is his father."<sup>55</sup> As with the Old Testament, most of the references to God as *Father* in the second-temple literature are centered on His actions toward Israel, with the notable exception of the Messiah. In the latter case, God is simply called His Father, and the Messiah is called His Son by virtue of their relationship, and not due to any action on God's part.

It should also be pointed out that, both in the Old Testament and the second-temple literature, although called *Father*, at times, this is not a common designation for God, and does not typically carry the personal tone that the word usually does when used, for example, in reference to human fathers. This will change drastically in the New Testament. For now, the key takeaway, is that, in the Old Testament (and the second-temple Jewish literature), YHWH is identified as *Father*, primarily by virtue of His actions toward Israel, with the notable exception of His relationship with His Messiah. This identification of God as *Father* will be important in interpreting Jesus's own view of God in the Gospels.

---

<sup>53</sup> Wisdom 12:19.

<sup>54</sup> Wisdom 14:3; Sirach 23:1, 4; 3 Maccabees 5:7, for example.

<sup>55</sup> Wisdom 2:16.

## The Father in the New Testament

Up until this point, the view that God is a Father, although present in second-temple Judaism, was not very prevalent. This was not the main way that God was identified by second-temple Jews, and the title (Father) was usually used in reference to God's actions toward Israel, especially His creating/choosing and redeeming them, rather than describing something about His nature. This much more common use of the title is contrasted by its use when discussing the Messiah. In this latter case, *Father* was not predicated upon any particular action of God, but, rather, described a particular type of relationship between God and His Messiah, namely that the Messiah was His Son. Although this sort of language was typical when describing royal relationships (between great kings and subject kings), which also applies to the discussion about the Messiah (it was believed the Messiah would be some sort of King), it is evident that there is a difference between the nature of God's relationship with Israel, the world, and the Messiah. His relationship with the Messiah seems to be more personal, not having been predicated upon God's actions. This theme is developed in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, and can be seen in how Jesus, Himself, spoke of the Father.

As will be shown, the Gospels follow a clear pattern when talking about God as *Father*, which consistently distinguishes between His relationship with believers and His relationship with Jesus. As in the Old Testament, there seems to be something special about God's relationship with Jesus that is not present in His relationship with believers. Furthermore, there is a much more personal tone in the New Testament's usage of *Father*, in reference to God, that is nearly absent in the Old Testament. Lastly, the title *Father* is significantly more common in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, than in the entire Old Testament, showing that, by the first century, this was a much more common way to refer to God, especially for Christians. This

section will also show how the title *Father* sees a bit of development between the Gospels and the Epistles, with the latter using the title to identify the Father more clearly as the first Person of the Trinity. In both cases, however, it seems that the Father is, in fact, more clearly identified with YHWH, whereas Jesus, although also identified with YHWH through the title, Lord, is more commonly viewed as YHWH's (the Father's) Son. It is my contention that, to alleviate this tension, Paul developed a pattern when speaking about both the Father and the Son in which he consistently uses the titles *God* and *Lord*, respectively. This Pauline pattern continues throughout the rest of the New Testament epistles, and in the early church fathers, although not as consistently as in Paul.

### The Father in the Gospels

The first point that needs to be emphasized regarding the use of the title *Father*, in the Gospels, is the sheer number of times it occurs. In the Old Testament, God is referred to as *Father* approximately fourteen times.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, in the Gospels, alone, God is called *Father* approximately 142 times, with an additional 76 references, in the Epistles. By far, the Gospel that includes the greatest number of references to God as *Father* is the Gospel of John, with about 94 references, whereas the Gospel with the least references to God as *Father* is the Gospel of Mark, with about four references. These numbers show two things. First, as explained above, the New Testament, in general reflects how much more common it became, during the first century, to refer to God as *Father*, as compared to the Old Testament. Second, since Mark is generally believed to have been the first Gospel to have been written, whereas John is believed to have been the last Gospel written, the drastic difference in number of references between the two

---

<sup>56</sup> These numbers are based on my own counting, using a Concordance. Although they may not be exact, they do reflect the main point that I am making, here.

Gospels is consistent with my claim that the frequency of usage of the title *Father*, for God, became more common over time.

The second point that needs to be emphasized is the personal nature of the title *Father*, in the New Testament, as opposed to the Old Testament. This can be seen, for example, in the term *Abba*, which is the Aramaic word used to address one's father, akin to calling Him, *Dad*.<sup>57</sup> Although the Old Testament does call God *Father* at times, as shown above, "There is no evidence for anyone prior to Jesus addressing God with this word of daring intimacy."<sup>58</sup> This word is used only two more times, in the New Testament (Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6), both of which include believers into this filial relationship with the Father, through adoption through the Holy Spirit. As such, not only does the New Testament refer to God as *Father* in a much more personal way than the Old Testament, in these three passages, alone, the difference in the nature of the relationship between God and Jesus, and God and believers, can be seen. Whereas Jesus outright calls God, *Abba*, reflecting a personal relationship that was unheard of, at the time, Christians must be *adopted* into this relationship, and call God, *Abba*, only through the Holy Spirit. This distinction in the nature of the relationship between God and Jesus will be explained further, below, when the pattern used in the Gospels to refer to the Father will be described.

The final point of emphasis, before going to the verses, themselves, is that there is no doubt that the Father, in the New Testament, is viewed as the very same God of the Old Testament. This can be seen in the Gospels, themselves, as in certain commentaries on the Gospels, and in the early church fathers' interpretation of Gospel texts. As explained in the previous section, both the Old Testament and the second-temple Jewish literature called God,

---

<sup>57</sup> Mary Healy and Peter Williamson, *The Gospel of Mark: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 456.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

*Father*. As such, when Jesus spoke about the Father, and the New Testament authors wrote about the Father, it is a safe assumption that first-century Jews would have understood them to be talking about the very same Father revealed in Scripture. In much the same way that first-century Jews would have understood *God* to refer to YHWH, it is difficult to imagine they would have understood *Father* in any other way. If this is the case, and it seems likely that it is, the fact that Jesus never clarified or corrected His audience on the matter shows that Jesus was, indeed, speaking about the very same God of Israel. If there was some distinction to be made between YHWH and the Father, as Jesus called Him, we would expect that distinction to be made by Jesus, or the Gospel authors, themselves. Simply put, then, given the historical and literary context, the first-century audience would have understood that the Father of whom Jesus spoke was the very same God of Israel, who was also called Father.

Aside from the historical context, there are certain passages that make the above assumption explicit. For example, throughout the entire Gospels, and the Epistles, *God* and *Father* are used almost interchangeably. The very same “heavenly Father,” or “Father, who is in heaven” (Mt. 23:9) is the very same God who is in heaven, sitting on His throne (Mat. 23:22). Similarly, of the very same God of whom it is said, “You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him” (Lk. 4:8), it is said that Jesus is His Son (Lk. 4:9). The very same God who created the world through the Word, and with whom the Word was “in the beginning” (Jn. 1:1), is the same God and Father from whom the Word came (Jn. 1:14). Furthermore, certain passages that reference the Father are either based on Old Testament passages that reference YHWH, or interpret these passages in unique ways, attributing them to the very same God of Jesus. For example, Jesus said, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk. 6:36). According to Pablo T. Gadenz, this commandment is based on the Old Testament teachings about the mercy of



God, YHWH, as in Exodus 34:6, and asserts that Jesus “is interpreting another Torah commandment – ‘Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy’ (Lev. 19:2) – in terms of the divine attribute of mercy.”<sup>59</sup> The implication, then, is that, when Jesus speaks about the Father, in this passage, He is talking about the very same YHWH of the Old Testament.

Similarly, Jewish scholar Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik notes that Jesus’s words in Matthew 5:16, a call to “give honor to your Father in heaven,” is a teaching that is also found in the Talmud, calling Jews to “Love YHWH your God...so that the name of heaven will be loved because of you.”<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that this commentary is from the 1800s, and the Talmud was completed by the sixth century. This Jewish scholar is showing how Jesus’s teachings about the Father have historically been interpreted, by Jews, to be about YHWH, in harmony with what is being proposed, here. This Jewish interpretation of Jesus’s words can be found in the Gospels, as well, for, in response to Jesus’s claim that “The Father and I are one” (Jn. 10:30), the “Jewish leaders” attempt to stone Him for blasphemy “because you, a man, are claiming to be God” (Jn. 10:33). There can be no doubt that the God of whom they are speaking was no other than YHWH, the God of Israel, for they knew no other God. This very God, Jesus was calling *Father*. As stated by Bauckham,

“Just as Israel identified God as the God who brought Israel out of Egypt and by telling the story of God’s history with Israel, so the New Testament identifies God as the God of Jesus Christ and by telling the story of Jesus as the story of the salvation of the world. The new story is consistent with the already known identity of the God of Israel, but new as the way he now identifies himself finally and

---

<sup>59</sup> Pablo T. Gadenz, *The Gospel of Luke: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 119.

<sup>60</sup> Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament: Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik’s Commentary to the Gospels* (Phi: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 104.

universally, the Creator and Ruler of all who in Jesus Christ has become the gracious Saviour of all.”<sup>61</sup>

The early church fathers also support this interpretation, but this will be discussed in more detail, later. For now, it seems it would be very difficult to interpret Jesus’s teachings about the Father to be about any other Being that is not YHWH, the God of Israel. This conclusion harmonizes with the historical context, with how first-century Jews would have understood these teachings, and is supported by key passages and commentaries, as well. Having established that this is the case, we can now move on to surveying the Gospel narratives and their view of the Father, revealing a definitive pattern in how Jesus spoke about God.

### The Gospel Pattern

It is very telling that nearly every single reference to God, as *Father*, in the Gospels are placed almost exclusively on the mouth of Jesus. This is significant for, theologically speaking, Jesus is the one who reveals God fully and clearly to the world,<sup>62</sup> and it is no coincidence that the way Jesus chose to reveal God was as the Father. In doing so, Jesus, or the Gospel writers, were very careful with how the Father is spoken of, seeking to make a clear distinction between the Father’s relationship with the Son, and His relationship with believers. This is what I am calling *the Gospel pattern*, and it consists in a consistent use of specific articles that precede the title *Father*, depending on what relationship is being described.<sup>63</sup> For example, Matthew 6:26 says, “They do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns, yet *your* heavenly Father feeds them” (emphasis

---

<sup>61</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: Kindle Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), loc. 747.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 591.

<sup>63</sup> My analysis of this pattern is based on the English translations of Scripture, rather than on the original Greek manuscripts. As such, there is space for correction. However, as will be seen, this pattern is far too consistent to a coincidence, and has been observed by other theologians who have studied the Greek.

mine). Yet, Luke 10:22 says, “All things have been given to me by *my* Father” (emphasis mine). The former describes God’s filial relationship with believers, or with people, in general, whereas the latter describes His filial relationship with Jesus. This distinction in the use, or absence, of the preceding article is incredibly consistent throughout the Gospels, with only one notable exception which will be discussed, below.

There are two filial relationships being described in the Gospels, that of the Father and the world (or believers), and that of the Father and the Son. Both are clearly distinguished from one another by the consistent use of specific articles before the title *Father*. Whenever Jesus is speaking about the Father in relation to the world, He uses the possessive article, *your*, as in, “your Father in heaven” (Mt. 18:14). In contrast, whenever Jesus speaks about the Father in relation to Himself, He uses the possessive article, *my*, as in, “my heavenly Father” (Mt. 20:23). Initially, this may seem like simple grammar or syntax, implying nothing too significant. However, it is, indeed, significant that the use of these articles is an either/or situation. Either He is speaking about “your Father,” or He is speaking about “my Father,” but never “our Father.” So much is this distinction emphasized that, even when He is speaking about the Father in relation to both the world *and* the Son, Jesus seems to refuse to use the article *our*, even though this would be a simpler sentence. For example, speaking to Mary Magdalene, Jesus says, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (Jn. 20:17). This begs the question as to why Jesus did not simply say, “I am ascending to *our* Father, to *our* God.”

I propose that the only logical explanation for this insistence on the use of the possessive articles is to distinguish the type of relationship that exists between the Father and the world, and the Father and the Son. God is, indeed, our Father, as He is Jesus’s Father, and yet, He is *not* our Father in the same way as He is Jesus’s Father. There is a special type of relationship between

the Father and the Son that does not exist between the Father and the world, or even believers; a relationship that is further defined by Jesus's use of the Aramaic, *Abba*, as mentioned above, and His claim that He and the Father are one, which the Jewish leaders took to mean equality with God. This is Aquinas's interpretation, as he labels as incorrect the Arian view that, "God is the Father of the Son in the same way that he is our Father, and that he is the God of the Son in the same way that he is our God."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Augustine states that, "He saith not, Our Father: in one sense, therefor, is He mine, in another sense, yours; by nature mine, by grace yours."<sup>65</sup>

There is one possible exception to the pattern described above, found in Matthew 6:9. In this passage, Jesus is teaching His disciples how to pray to the Father, and says, "So pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored." This is the *only* time Jesus uses the article *our*, in reference to the Father. Yet, it is clear that this does not actually contradict the pattern that has been described, above, for Jesus is not using *our* in reference to both He and His disciples, rather He is offering an example of how a believer should pray.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the words found in verses 9-13 are the words of believers, speaking to God, even though Jesus is the one speaking them. He is placing Himself, for the moment, in the position of His disciples, speaking as they should speak, showing them how they should pray. He is not, however, including Himself within the "our" in "our Father." Even with this passage, then, the use of specific articles remains incredibly consistent. This consistent use of the possessive articles that depend on the relationship being described would be less impactful if Jesus only spoke like this a

---

<sup>64</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 13-21* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 266.

<sup>65</sup> Saint Augustine, "Tractate CXXI," *Sermons or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* (1888), 2902.

<sup>66</sup> Curtis Mitch, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 164.

few times. This is not the case, however, for this distinction occurs well over 100 times, in the Gospels, and the only notable exception is the Lord's Prayer, which has already been explained.<sup>67</sup> It would seem, then, that the Gospels are incredibly consistent in making a distinction between the Father's relationship with the Son, and His relationship with the rest of the world, especially believers, and that this distinction is reflected in the use of particular articles that precede the title of *Father*.

This brief survey and analysis of what I am calling the Gospel Pattern is meant to show four main points. First, a sort of progression can be seen from the Old Testament and the New Testament in terms of the frequency and nature of the title of "Father," for God. In the Old Testament, God was rarely called Father, with only around a dozen occurrences, whereas in the Gospels, alone, He is called Father over 100 times. Many of the New Testament Epistles were written even prior to the Gospels, and this same progression can be observed, there, as will be seen, below. Second, the use of personal and possessive pronouns preceding the title of Father is much more common in the Gospels, showing a possible development in the type of relationship the first-century audience understood to have with God, in comparison to the Old Testament. This will be much more evident in my survey of the New Testament Epistles, below. Third, the relationship between the Father and Jesus seems to be of a different nature than the relationship between the Father and the rest of the world, a point that is consistent with the Old Testament's description of the relationship between the Father and His Messiah. Lastly, and this is the main takeaway, in the Gospels the Father is clearly identified as the very same God of Israel, YHWH. This is how the first-century audience would have understood Jesus, and Jesus does not seem to offer any sort of correction to this understanding. As for our question concerning the identity of

---

<sup>67</sup> Once again, this is an approximation, based on my own count.

the Father in the first century, then, the answer (so far) seems to be that the Father is YHWH, the God of Israel, and Jesus is His Son.

### The Father in the New Testament Epistles

In total, there are approximately 76 references to God, as *Father*, in the New Testament Epistles and Acts. There is no significant difference in the number of times any specific letter or author uses the title, with Paul having the most uses. However, since Paul also has the most letters written in the New Testament, this is not surprising. The most significant contribution that the New Testament Epistles offer regarding the topic at hand is found in the Pauline distinction between the Father and the Son through the titles *God* and *Lord*, respectively. This will be discussed in the next chapter, however. The key takeaways, here, will be the continuation of the personal use of the title, *Father*, in the Epistles, and the clear identification of the Father with YHWH. Simply put, although the New Testament authors do identify Jesus with YHWH, the primary view was that the Father was YHWH, and Jesus His Son. The New Testament Epistles confirm this conclusion.

#### A. Acts

The book of Acts continues the practice of the Gospels in placing the title *Father* in the mouth of Jesus, while at the same time making it more common for Christians to speak of God as the Father. Acts 1 serves as somewhat of a prologue to the rest of the book, recapitulating events that took place toward the end of the author's previous book, the Gospel of Luke.<sup>68</sup> Chapter 2 functions as a sort of transition between the time of Jesus, and the time of the church, describing the fulfillment of Jesus's promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The rest of Acts

---

<sup>68</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 49.

centers on the Apostles and the growth of the church. There are only four references to the Father in Acts, all of which correspond to these sections. For example, Acts 1:4-7 quote Jesus speaking about “my Father” and “the Father,” the former being consistent with the Gospel Pattern described above, while the latter being only somewhat consistent. While not talking about the Son, Jesus immediately references the sending of the Holy Spirit after using the definite article (*the* Father). In the Gospels, the definite article is only used in relation to the Father when Jesus is speaking about Him in close connection with the Son, or the sending of the Son or Messiah. In this case, it is not the sending of the Son, but the sending of the Holy Spirit, and rather than using a possessive article as He did three verses prior, He uses the definite article. It is almost as if this definite article is intentionally reserved for when speaking about any of the three Persons of the Trinity, in relation to one another.

A similar practice is found in the next reference to the Father (Ac. 2:33), in which Peter is, once again, speaking about the sending of the Holy Spirit “from the Father.” The definite article is used here, as well. The last reference to the Father is found in Acts 13:33 in which Paul quotes Psalm 2:7, “You are my son; today I have become your father,” which finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. As explained by Bock, this confirms the Messianic interpretation of this Psalm, and its application to Jesus does not imply that Jesus somehow *became* God’s Son after His resurrection, but rather that His resurrection made Jesus’s Sonship *evident* to the world.<sup>69</sup> Now, of key significance is the identification of the Father, in Acts, with the God of Israel. This can be seen in the references to Old Testament passages such as Psalms 2. For example, Peter states that Jesus is sitting at the “right hand of God” (Ac. 2:33), having received the promise of the Holy Spirit “from the Father.” It is evident that, for Peter, the Father is the very same God

---

<sup>69</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 456.

just mentioned. Peter goes on to cite this as a fulfillment of Psalm 110:1, in which “The LORD” (YHWH) says to “my lord” (Jesus), “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” In other words, this very God, who is the Father, is the one speaking in Psalm 110:1. Therefore, the Father is YHWH, and Jesus His Son/Messiah. Similarly, Acts 13:33 says that “God” has fulfilled His promise to us by raising Jesus, “as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘You are my Son; today I have fathered you’” (Psalm 2:7). The one speaking in Psalm 2 is no other than YHWH, called *God* in Acts (and the entire New Testament), who is also the Father of Jesus, the Messiah. Given this close identification between God, the Father, and YHWH, there can be no doubt that Luke, Peter, and Paul (and, likely, all first-century Christians) believed the Father to be YHWH, and Jesus His Son.

## B. Pauline Epistles

Many of Paul’s references to the Father occur in the introduction and conclusion of his letters, identifying the God and Lord of whom he is teaching in each respective letter. As such, these introductions and conclusions can be used as an interpretive guide for Paul’s letters, helping the reader understand who he is talking about when, for example, he mentions God, the Lord, or the Father. This is precisely the case in Paul’s salutation in Romans. As stated by Douglass Moo, “If we are to appreciate Paul’s teaching in these first seven verses – and, indeed, throughout his letter – we must have a sense of what the language Paul uses may have meant to the first readers of this letter.”<sup>70</sup> With this in mind, Paul’s salutation in the book of Romans confirms the previous interpretation proposed above regarding the identity of the Father in the Gospels, and how first-century Jews would have understood them. In this salutation, Paul says

---

<sup>70</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 39.



that he has been set apart “for the gospel of God” (1:1). Who is this God? Paul continues to say, “This gospel he [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son who was a descendant of David with reference to the flesh” (1:2-3). There can be no doubt, from this verse alone, that Paul understood God to be YHWH, the God of Israel revealed in the Old Testament, and understood Jesus to be His Son. This is the primary understanding, in the New Testament, of the phrase, “Son of God.” For first-century Jews, the God in that phrase could have been no other than YHWH, as is confirmed by Paul, here. This fact will be of extreme significance when, what I will call *the Pauline Pattern*, is discussed. For now, the main point that needs to be emphasized is that, for Paul, God is YHWH, and Jesus is His Son.<sup>71</sup>

This reality (that God is YHWH) serves as an interpretive guide when reading passages about the Father, for it is this very God whom Paul has identified with YHWH that he calls *Father*. For example, in Romans, after having established that the God of whom he is speaking is the very same God of Israel, YHWH, he concludes his salutation by saying, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!” (Ro. 1:7). This same identification occurs in every single salutation in Paul’s letters. Regarding the nature of these salutations, David Garland explains,

“Had Paul not identified God as the Father of Jesus Christ, this benediction would have had a familiar ring in the synagogue but would also have been jarring. They synagogue blessed the God of our fathers, who revealed himself to Moses as ‘I AM

---

<sup>71</sup> As I have mentioned before, this does not contradict the claim that, for Paul and others, Jesus was also identified with YHWH. The main concern right now, however, is the identity of the Father, not the Son.

WHO I AM.’ For Christians, God is now revealed as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, Paul’s salutation was like those used in Jewish synagogues, and as such the God of whom Paul speaks in these salutations would have been understood, by the first-century audience, as the very same God of Israel, YHWH. It is this very same God that Paul calls the Father of Jesus. Garland goes on to explain the significance of this salutation, saying, “First, as the Father of Jesus Christ, God is no longer to be known simply as the Father of Israel. . . Second, it declares that Jesus is the foremost blessing God has bestowed on humankind.”<sup>73</sup>

Paul’s use of the title *Father* is also much more personal than how it has been used, thus far. As mentioned previously, two of the three uses of the Aramaic *Abba* are by Paul (Ro. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6), both in reference to believers, not Jesus. In Pauline theology, believers have been adopted by God, through the Spirit, and are now part of the filial relationship with God that exists between the Father and the Son. The intimate nature of believers’ relationship with the Father is further indicated by the use of the personal article, “our,” as in “our Father” (Eph. 1:2; Php. 1:2, for example). It should be noted that only two of the fourteen references to God as *Father*, in the Old Testament, use the personal article “our,” in this way. As explained, in the Old Testament, God was viewed as *Father* primarily through His actions toward Israel, and not by virtue of the relationship, itself. Yet, for Paul, the use of this article is very common, appearing in almost every salutation in each of his letters, with the only notable exceptions being 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. In every other letter, Paul calls God “our Father,” in much the same way as he calls Jesus “our Lord.”

---

<sup>72</sup> David E. Garland, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, 2 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 58.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

It becomes clear in Paul that, in general, Scripture does not explicitly teach the view that God is a Father to *every* human being, although there are ways to reach this conclusion, as alluded to in the survey of Old Testament passages, above. Rather, what Scripture seems to teach, clearly, is that God is the Father of Israel (in the Old Testament), of Jesus (in the New Testament), and of believers (in the Epistles). Although God's relationship as *Father* with Israel is personal in some sense, it is much more personal with Jesus and believers, especially with Jesus. In fact, Paul almost exclusively references the Father only in close connection to Jesus. In his salutations, for example, he typically says, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!" (Php. 1:2). Rarely, for Paul, is the title *Father* used without Jesus being referenced shortly before or after, pointing to the fact that, although God is our Father, we enter this filial relationship only because of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. This also points to the fact that, for Paul, God's identity as *Father* is not one of nature, but of relationship. In other words, the later trinitarian idea that the Father is the Father by virtue of His nature, and, therefore, He has always been the Father, even "before" Creation, was not present in Paul's letters. This is not to say that this idea is completely foreign to Scripture, or at odds with Scripture, but it is important to note that this was not the intention of Paul when speaking about God as *Father*. Paul describes the nature of God's relationship with Jesus and believers, not the nature of God, Himself. Nevertheless, the key takeaway in Paul's use of the title *Father* for God is that the Father is definitely the very same God of Israel, YHWH, who is also the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### Remaining Epistles and Revelation

Outside of references to God as the Father of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:17; 1 Jn. 1:3, for example), the non-Pauline Epistles are somewhat less clear as to the identity of the

Father.<sup>74</sup> As such, only the context of what has been written before can help in identifying who the Epistle writers were calling *Father*. If the New Testament authors are speaking about the very same God that Paul spoke of, and there is no reason to believe otherwise, then it is a safe assumption that “God the Father” (Jas. 1:27) is no other than YHWH, as well. In most of the Epistles, in fact, the Father is identified as God the Father (1 Pe. 1:2; 2 Jn. 1:3; Jd. 1:1, for example). Given that there is no other God but God (YHWH), especially for first-century Jews, then this must mean that God the Father is none other than YHWH. James offers a bit more clarification by calling the Father, *Lord*, the only place in the New Testament in which these two titles are used for God, simultaneously. Once again, assuming that James is talking about the very same God and Lord as the rest of Scripture, then there can be no doubt that he is identifying the Father with YHWH.

The only other interpretive option regarding the non-Pauline Epistles’ use of the title *Father* would be that they are all talking about the first Person of the Trinity, the Father of Jesus Christ, without explicitly identifying Him with YHWH. This is, of course, a possibility, but given the context in which these Epistles were written, it seems highly unlikely that these authors did not have YHWH in mind when calling the Father *God* and *Lord*. However, this interpretation gains some credibility in the Johannine epistles in which he refers to God as *Father* almost exclusively by using the definite article, *the* (1 Jn. 1:2, 3; 2:1, 13, 14, 16; 2 Jn. 1:4, for example). For John, God is either the Father of Jesus Christ (2 Jn. 1:3, 9, for example), or simply “the Father.” If the author of the Johannine epistles is the very same John who authored the Gospel of John, which seems to be the case, then it could be argued that he is following the same pattern of the Gospels described above. As such, the use of the definite article that precedes *Father* could

---

<sup>74</sup> What I mean by this is that, unlike in Paul, there is no clear identification of the Father with the God of Israel, citing Old Testament passages, and no identifiable pattern as to the titles *God* and *Lord*.

very well be being used to identify the Father explicitly with the first Person of the Trinity, the Father of Jesus Christ. However, this does not contradict the previous claim that, in the New Testament, the primary identification of the Father was with the God of Israel, YHWH; it merely clarifies the intention of the author of the Johannine epistles.

There are two notable exceptions to everything that has been said, thus far, regarding the non-Pauline Epistles. In the book of Hebrews, three of the four references to God as *Father* are in the context of the Messiah, citing Old Testament prophecy. This is because one of the main themes and purposes in Hebrews is not the identity of God, but the deity of the Son.<sup>75</sup> The prevalent quotations of Old Testament passages when speaking about God as *Father* is also in line with this purpose, for the author of Hebrews in general frequently cites the Old Testament as “the basis for his teaching on Christ and salvation.”<sup>76</sup> This Old Testament emphasis makes it very clear that the Father of whom Hebrews is speaking is no other than YHWH, directly citing Old Testament words spoken by YHWH (Heb. 1:5a; 1:5b; 5:5). The second notable exception is the book of Revelation in which, as in the Gospels, references to God as *Father* are almost exclusively placed on the mouth of Jesus. This supports the previous hypothesis that the Johannine writings follow the Gospel Pattern described above. In this case, Jesus, three times, calls God “my Father” (Rev. 2:28; 3:5, 21), and once the author calls God “his [Jesus’s] God and Father” (Rev. 1:6). Given that Jesus, in the Gospels, has identified “His God” as YHWH, then John can be speaking about no other than YHWH here, as well. It is YHWH who is Jesus’s God and Father, and as such it is YHWH who is being called *Father*, here, as well.

---

<sup>75</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 67.

<sup>76</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 43.

This fact is made clearer by Jesus's statement that He has "sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev. 3:21). This is a clear reference to Psalm 110:1, in which YHWH promises His Messiah that He will "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." This passage is cited in the New Testament, as in Matthew 22:44, as evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, and God (YHWH) is His Father. Furthermore, throughout all of Scripture, YHWH is said to be sitting on His throne in heaven (Ps. 47:8, for example). In fact, of the very same God that Jesus calls His Father in the Gospels, Jesus says sits on His throne in heaven (Mat. 23:22). As such, there can be no doubt that when Jesus refers to His Father who sits "on his throne," in Revelations, he is speaking of no other than the God of Israel, YHWH, whom Jesus reveals fully as His Father in the Gospels. It seems clear, then, that the New Testament Epistles, especially the Pauline Epistles, identify the Father as YHWH, and Jesus as His Son. This survey is limited to those passages that explicitly reference the Father, but this conclusion will become even clearer when the Pauline Pattern is discussed in a later chapter. For now, we will conclude this chapter with a survey of the writings of the early church fathers.

### **The Father in the Writings of the Early Church Fathers**

The following survey of the early church fathers is not exhaustive, but only representative. There are more references to God as *Father* in these writings, but since my primary purpose when reading these writings was to search for a pattern similar to the Pauline Pattern, which has yet to be discussed, I did not record every single time the Father was mentioned. Once the Pauline Pattern is discussed, it will become very clear that, for the early church fathers, the Father was *God*, and *God* was YHWH, the Father of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there should be enough evidence, here, to establish a clear connection between the title *Father* and YHWH, in the writings of the early church fathers. The following survey reflects

a general chronological order, from earliest to latest, and I include those writings that are anonymous, but were written during this time, as well.

The primary way in which the Father is spoken of in the early church fathers is in reference to Jesus Christ. More so than any other writing that has yet to be discussed, the early church fathers clearly identify the Father primarily as the first Person of the Trinity, rather than as YHWH. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to believe that, for these authors, the two were one and the same. The Didache, representing the earliest teachings of the church, after the New Testament writings, records a prayer to the Father that was to be recited during the partaking of the Eucharist. The prayer uses Old Testament language and imagery, intermixed with New Testament teachings. It begins by saying, “We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which You madest known to us through Jesus they Servant.”<sup>77</sup> The use of the personal article *our* should be noted, as it continues the pattern established in the New Testament Epistles, explained above. As such, it should be safe to assume that “our Father,” in the Didache, is the same “our Father,” as in the New Testament Epistles. If this is the case, then there can be no doubt that the Father, in the Didache, is none other than YHWH, for this is who He is in the Epistles. Further confirmation of this lies in the Old Testament language of the “holy vine of David,” likely referring to Messianic passages such as Jeremiah 23:5, which speaks about the “Branch” of David. This is likely a play on words, referencing Jesus’s own claim to be “the vine” (Jn. 15:1). The references in this prayer to Jesus as the Servant of “our Father,” alongside the declarations that “to Thee [our Father] be the glory for ever,” and references to “Thy [our Father] kingdom, point to Jesus’s own teachings about the glory and kingdom of God (Lk. 2:14

---

<sup>77</sup> *The Didache*, translated by Kirsopp Lake (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1912), Ch. 9.

and Mt. 6:33, respectively). As in Jesus’s teachings, the God and Father being spoken of, here, can be no other than YHWH, the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

Written around the same time as the Didache, or slightly later, 1 Clement refers to God as “the Father and Creator of the Universe.”<sup>78</sup> He, then, refers to the “merciful Father,” as the one called “the Most High,” “God,” and “Lord,” in Deuteronomy 32:8 and some unknown second-temple literature.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the Epistle of Barnabas, written around the same time as 1 Clement, cites various Old Testament passages such as Jeremiah 7:22, in which YHWH speaks to Israel, and concludes that “We ought therefore, being possessed of understanding, to perceive the gracious intention of our Father; for He speaks to us, desirous that we, not going astray like them, should ask how we may approach Him.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, “our Father” is He who spoke to us through Jeremiah (YHWH). The Martyrdom of Polycarp reflects a similar style to the Pauline Epistles, beginning with a salutation that includes, “Mercy, peace and love from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, be multiplied.”<sup>81</sup> Given the similarity to the writings of Paul, it is a safe assumption that both are speaking about the very same God the Father, namely YHWH. This becomes clear when the author of this letter, quoting Polycarp before his death, says, “O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ.”<sup>82</sup> The divine title “Lord God Almighty,” a title used of God in the Old Testament (Gen. 17:1), and the later

---

<sup>78</sup> Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, [https://ccel.org/ccel/clement\\_rome/first\\_epistle\\_to\\_the\\_corinthians](https://ccel.org/ccel/clement_rome/first_epistle_to_the_corinthians), Ch. 19.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. Ch. 29.

<sup>80</sup> *Epistle of Barnabas*, <https://ccel.org/ccel/barnabas/epistle>, Ch. II.

<sup>81</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, [https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/martyrdom\\_of\\_polycarp](https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/martyrdom_of_polycarp).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Ch. 14.



reference to Creation, leave no room for doubt that the Father being spoken of, here, is YHWH, and Jesus is His Son.

Still in the second and third centuries, Ignatius wrote several letters in which he references the Father, primarily in relation to Jesus Christ. The most common way in which Ignatius references the Father is as “God the Father” or “God the most high Father.”<sup>83</sup> Both are very similar to the New Testament Epistles’ salutations, especially the Pauline Epistles, with the latter using the title “most high” that is reserved for God in the Old Testament (Dt. 32:8). The title “Most High Father” is also used in Ignatius’s letter to the Romans, affirming that Jesus Christ is “His only-begotten Son.”<sup>84</sup> Once again, there can be no doubt that, for Ignatius, the Father was none other than YHWH, and Jesus Christ is His Son. So far, almost none of the writings that have been mentioned were written with the explicit intention of detailing Christian teachings. The most notable exception, thus far, has been the Didache, which is said to reflect some of the earliest church teachings and practices. The writings that will now be discussed fall under the category of theological or polemic writing, intended to teach sound doctrine and correct false teachings. As such, at least in my mind, this sort of writing has more weight on the topic at hand.

Irenaeus of Lyons’s *Against Heresies* was written to correct certain heresies of the time (late second century) and clarify church teaching. Perhaps due to the theological nature of this writing, Irenaeus is much clearer about who he believes the Father is than other authors. He begins by calling God “the Almighty,” and Jesus “the Son of God.”<sup>85</sup> He goes on to state more

---

<sup>83</sup> Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*, [https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius\\_antioch/epistles\\_of\\_ignatius](https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius_antioch/epistles_of_ignatius), Salutations.

<sup>84</sup> Ignatius, *To the Romans*, [https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius\\_antioch/epistles\\_of\\_ignatius](https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius_antioch/epistles_of_ignatius), Salutations.

<sup>85</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* (Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012), 28.

clearly that the church believes “in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea...and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God.”<sup>86</sup> This language reflects that which would later be used in the Nicene Creed and traditional trinitarian formulas in the church, which is incredibly significant because it is at this time that the doctrine of the Trinity was being discussed and developed the most.<sup>87</sup> It is clear from these statements that, for Irenaeus, and according to him, for the church, as well, the Father is the very same God, Creator of the Universe, and Father of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Father, for Irenaeus, is YHWH. He goes on to say that God is, “The only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father.”<sup>88</sup> Of this very same God, who created the Universe, Irenaeus goes on to say, “This God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and then proceeds to cite Paul as evidence of this.<sup>89</sup> This confirms that, for Irenaeus, not only is the Father YHWH, the Creator of the Universe, but that he believes this is what Paul taught, as well, confirming my own beliefs on the matter, as outlined above. Irenaeus goes on to develop this idea, further, seeking to explain the logic of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Like Irenaeus, Origen is also one of the most influential church fathers, especially on the doctrine of the Trinity. More than once, Origen seeks to establish the identity of God, the Father, and explain Jesus’s relation to Him. In *On First Principles*, Origen begins by establishing what he claims are the three major teachings of the Apostles, stating, “First, That there is one God,

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>87</sup> The Apostles’ Creed also reflects a similar language, beginning by stating that “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.” This statement clearly identifies the Father as the Almighty Creator, which can be none other than YHWH, and Jesus as His Son.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 96.

who created and arranged all things, and who, when nothing existed, called all things into being.”<sup>90</sup> From this, it is clear that the God to whom he is referring is none other than YHWH, who is said to have created the Universe *ex nihilo* in Genesis 1. Origen goes on to say that “This just and good God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself gave the law and the prophets, and the Gospels, being also the God of the apostles and of the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>91</sup> This statement is incredibly significant for it shows that, for Origen, not only is the Father the very same YHWH of Creation, and Jesus His Son, but that this is the very same God being spoken of and taught about in both Testaments. This is a strong confirmation of what I have said here, thus far, namely that the Father, in the New Testament, is the very same God of the Old Testament, called YHWH. This is a claim that is developed further, by Origen, but should be sufficient to support my claim about the Father in the early church fathers.

The writings of the Cappadocian Fathers conclude this section on some of the early church fathers that were most influential in the development on the doctrine of the Trinity. Tertullian will be looked at in a later chapter, as will Augustine and others. Given the late date of the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers, the theological language is much more advanced than anything that has been discussed, thus far. It is here where we begin to delve into concepts such as *substance*, *unbegottenness*, *nature*, primarily as an attempt to explain the Deity of Christ. As such, these writings reflect a much more developed doctrine of the Trinity, and, consequently, most references to the Father are in relation primarily to the first Person of the Trinity, and His relation to the Son. The focus here is not Jesus Christ, however, and as such most of these references to the Father are not relevant for the topic at hand.

---

<sup>90</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* (Fig, 2012), loc. 43.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

There is no doubt that the Cappadocian Fathers viewed the Father as the first Person of the Trinity, with whom Jesus was equal, and this was their primary view of the Father. However, there are a few indications that they also viewed the Father as YHWH. For example, St. Basil cites Acts 2:36, which speaks about God, and interprets this as speaking about the Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>92</sup> In that passage, Peter makes clear that the God of whom he is speaking is the very same God (YHWH) who promised the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the Messiah (Acts 2:17-21, 25-28). From this, it can be concluded that, for St. Basil, this very same God, who is YHWH, is the God and Father of Jesus Christ. In fact, Basil goes on to argue that God has been *Father* from the beginning, and states that it is the Father speaking when He reveals His divine name to Moses.<sup>93</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus follows this same line of thought, affirming, as well, that the Father is the Father, eternally.<sup>94</sup> He does not, however, make any clear indication as to whether he identifies the Father with YHWH, at least not through the title *Father*, itself. Once the Pauline Pattern is established, it will become clear that this is, indeed, Gregory of Nazianzus's view.

### Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to show that, both in Scripture and in the early church fathers, the Father is most closely identified as YHWH, whereas Jesus is identified as His Son. The Old Testament viewed God as Father primarily through His actions toward Israel, but also established a more personal relationship between the Father and His Messiah. The Gospels

---

<sup>92</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 132.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 145, 156.

<sup>94</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29: On the Son," *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cleodnius* (NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 48.

continue this distinction between God's relation to the world and His relation to Jesus, establishing a clear pattern in the use of the personal and definite articles that precede *Father*. Given the historical context, the first-century audience would have understood Jesus's teachings about the Father to be about the very same God of Israel revealed in the Old Testament, YHWH. Jesus does nothing to clarify or correct this and reinforces it by pointing to the Father as the very same God that sits on His throne in heaven. The Pauline Epistles reflect a much more personal way to speak to and about the Father, through the use of the personal article "our," as in "our Father," and through the use of the personal *Abba*. Paul also cites Old Testament passages in which YHWH speaks and says that this very God who is speaking is the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

The non-Pauline Epistles continue this trend of citing Old Testament passages in which YHWH speaks and identifying that God with the Father. Lastly, most of the writings of the early church fathers, up until the fourth century, show a clear identification of the Father as YHWH. Some of these writings claim to reflect the very teachings of the Apostles and the early church, which means that this is how Christians identified the Father until at least the fourth century. The Cappadocian Fathers reflect a more developed view of the Father, identifying Him more with the first Person of the Trinity than with YHWH, but in the case of St. Basil of Caesarea, he, too, identified the Father with YHWH. As such, there can be no doubt that, until at least the fourth century, the primary view of the Father was that He was YHWH, and that Jesus is the Son of YHWH. The question now becomes, in what sense is the Father YHWH, especially considering that Jesus is also identified with YHWH? This concept of identity is what will begin to be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: DIVINE IDENTITY IN SECOND-TEMPLE JUDAISM

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, after an in-depth survey of Scripture, other second-temple literature, and a sampling of the writings of the early church fathers, it was concluded that, until at least the fourth century, the Father was identified as the God of Israel; YHWH. The most common and consistent way in which these early Christians and writers viewed the relationship between YHWH and Jesus was that YHWH was the Father, and Jesus was his Son. To be sure, even in the Gospels there is a sense in which Jesus was also identified with or as YHWH, but the nature of this identification is less clear, more controversial, and required centuries of countless debates to fully develop and understand, and it could be argued that it is yet to be fully understood, today.<sup>95</sup> The identification of the Father as YHWH, however, and Jesus as the Son of YHWH, is clear, consistent, and indisputable throughout all of Scripture and the early church fathers. This identification does not seem to have ever been seriously questioned in Scripture or in the early church, and in many cases seems to have simply been assumed, as it is today.<sup>96</sup> In other words, whereas, even in Scripture, there are various possible interpretations as to the identity of Jesus and His relationship with YHWH, the identification of the Father as YHWH is not only assumed by the biblical authors and the first-century audience (given the Old Testament

---

<sup>95</sup> Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 4-5.

<sup>96</sup> For a brief survey of how this truth was affirmed and even assumed, but never actually argued by the early church fathers, see J.N.D. Kelly's *Early Christian Doctrines* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 90-95. As is the case in the New Testament, the early church fathers begin with the belief that the Father is YHWH, and their trinitarian discussions build from that truth. In other words, the identification of the Father as YHWH was a truth that was argued *from*, not argued *to*.

identification of YHWH as Father, as well as second-temple literature), but is explicitly taught in the New Testament and early church fathers, as was made clear in the previous chapter.

Given the conclusions drawn from the previous chapter, thus far the answer to the question being discussed in this dissertation (Who is the Father?) is that the Father is YHWH. This answer is not sufficient, however, to resolve the issues presented in the first chapter. Of particular interest in this chapter is the question regarding the nature of this identity. In other words, in what sense is the Father YHWH? One way to answer this question is to interpret the “is” in the statement, “The Father is YHWH” as meaning “the same as.” In other words, the statement “The Father is YHWH” is taken to be a statement of identity.<sup>97</sup> This answer becomes problematic, however, once other statements are made, namely “The Son is YHWH” and “The Spirit is YHWH.” This is an issue that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Another way to answer this question is to simply include the Father in the divine identity. This seems to be the approach taken by Paul and the New Testament authors, as well as some of the early church fathers, and is the approach that will be developed in this chapter.

In order to answer the question at hand (In what sense is the Father YHWH?), we must first establish what it means to be YHWH. In other words, how did second-temple Judaism, the New Testament, and the early church fathers understand the concept of divine identity, and how does the Father fit into this concept? This chapter will rely heavily on the work of Richard Bauckham, seeking to identify the second-temple view of divine identity, showing how this view was further developed in the New Testament, most notably in the case of what I call the Pauline Pattern, concluding with how this view of divine identity can be used to clarify the question regarding the identity of the Father and His relation to YHWH. The main thesis that will be

---

<sup>97</sup> Thomas D. Senior, “The Incarnation and the Trinity,” *Reason for the Hope Within* (William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 255.

defended, here, is that the second-temple view of divine identity, centered on who God is, rather than what God is, helps develop and clarify the New Testament identification of the Father as YHWH, and is also useful in interpreting the early church fathers' writings on the subject. I will begin by establishing the second-temple concept of divine identity and by discussing possible critiques of this view. I will then move on to a discussion on the Pauline Pattern and showing how this pattern reflects and fits into this concept of divine identity. This will be followed by another survey of the writings of the early church fathers to find out whether this Pauline Pattern was present, in any sense, in these writings, before putting it all together and concluding with a more complete, yet still tentative, answer to the question, "Who is the Father?"

### **The Second-Temple Concept of Divine Identity**

#### Summary of Richard Bauckham's View

It is relatively common in theological discussions about God to center the discussion on what God is, namely His divine attributes. This is certainly the case amongst philosophers and apologists who tend to hold to a concept like the Anselmian God, or the so-called "God of the philosophers."<sup>98</sup> For example, after having discussed his famous *Kalam* cosmological argument, William Lane Craig affirms,

Conceptual analysis enables us to recover a number of striking properties that must be possessed by such an ultramundane being. For as the cause of space and time, this entity must transcend space and time and therefore exist atemporally and nonspatially, at least without the universe. This transcendent cause must therefore be changeless and immaterial...beginningless and uncaused...unimaginably powerful...and most remarkably, such a transcendent cause is plausibly taken to be personal.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> When I say, "hold to a concept similar to the Anselmian God," I do not mean that these philosophers actually believe in this God. Rather, I mean that this is usually the agreed-upon conception of God that they use when discussing philosophical conceptions related to the existence of God.

<sup>99</sup> J. P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 479.



Similarly, Douglas Groothuis begins his defense of the existence of God by describing certain essential aspects of the Christian worldview, amongst which is the belief in God, whom he describes as “a self-conscious and reflecting being, an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Personality, who manifests every dimension of personality.”<sup>100</sup>

This emphasis on the nature or attributes of God is not limited to philosophers and apologists, however, but is also very common amongst Christian theologians. For example, Walter Elwell begins his description of God saying, “God is an invisible, personal, and living Spirit, distinguished from all other spirits by several kinds of attributes: metaphysically God is self-existent, eternal, and unchanging; intellectually God is omniscient, faithful, and wise...existentially God is free, authentic, and omnipotent.”<sup>101</sup> He goes on to say that “the essence of anything, simply put, equals its being (substance) plus its attributes.”<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Millard Erickson begins his discussion on God under the title of “What God is Like,” and proceeds to establish God’s major attributes, distinguishing them from His properties and acts.<sup>103</sup> Elmer Towns also begins his theological description of God by stating, “We begin our discussion of God by stating, ‘God is a being.’ This means God is a substantive entity, an eternal Person who exists in Spirit with certain absolute attributes.”<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 83.

<sup>101</sup> G. R. Lewis, “God, Attributes of,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 492.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 231-233.

<sup>104</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 97.

The above examples show that theological and philosophical discussion on God tends to focus on what He is, namely His divine nature and attributes. When it comes to Trinitarian discussions, one needs only to see how much emphasis is placed on discussing terms such as *essence, person, being, substance, or hypostasis* to understand how much of this discussion centers on God's nature and attributes. Richard Bauckham, however, argues that this was not the way that second-temple Jews viewed or spoke about God. According to Bauckham, the essence and nature of God are not the primary categories for Jewish theology, but rather it is identity.<sup>105</sup> In other words, second-temple Judaism was not so much concerned with *what* God is, but rather with *who* God is. This identity of God, according to Bauckham, falls under two major categories: His relation to Israel and His relation to all reality.<sup>106</sup> Regarding God's relation to Israel, God is the Redeemer, the God that chose Israel, brought them out of Egypt, and rescued them from slavery, making them His people.<sup>107</sup> Regarding God's relation to all reality, God is the sole Creator of the Universe, sovereign Lord and Ruler of all Creation.<sup>108</sup>

This unique identity of God, reflected in His relation to Israel and all reality, is expressed in the divine name, YHWH, which is a name that is exclusive to God (the God of Israel).<sup>109</sup> Whereas the actual meaning of the divine name is difficult to determine, with many scholars

---

<sup>105</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Kindle Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), loc. 19.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 129.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Carasik, ed., *Deuteronomy: The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedelot* (Phi: Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 218.

<sup>108</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 154.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

agreeing that it must have something to do with God's creative power and His eternal nature, the significance of the name for second-temple Jews was very clear. As stated by Richard McBrien,

Their God was a living God, known to them through the name *Yahweh* given to Moses and his descendants (Exodus 3:13-15). For the Israelites Yahweh is present and active wherever the name of Yahweh is known, recognized, and invoked. To call upon Yahweh is to summon Yahweh. . . To know Yahweh's name is to know Yahweh.<sup>110</sup>

In Scripture, the name of God points to the unique identity of God and His unique relationship with Israel. The Shema, for example, which is the central tenet or belief within Judaism, states that, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). The term translated, here, as "LORD," in the Hebrew text is actually the divine name. This passage is closely related to another, known as the Decalogue (Ex. 20:2-6; Deut. 5:6-10), in which worship is limited to God, alone. For this reason, Bauckham can affirm that both the Shema and the Decalogue "were clearly understood in this period as asserting the absolute uniqueness of YHWH as the one and only God."<sup>111</sup>

#### Critique of Bauckham's View

As critics will point out, Bauckham's claims are very difficult to prove with a high degree of certainty. Daniel McClellan, for example, writes that many of Bauckham's claims are either simply inferred by Bauckham, or "assumed with little or no argument."<sup>112</sup> Bauckham does go into considerable length, however, to delve into the biblical texts and second-temple literature, and show how these texts reflect or fit in with his biblical framework of divine identity. To say that he is simply inferring or assuming his position is to completely disregard his research on the

---

<sup>110</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), 279.

<sup>111</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 101.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel McClellan, "Cognitive Perspectives on Early Christology," *Biblical Interpretation* (UK: Brill, 2017), 650.

subject, and his interaction with the literature and some of his critics. Bauckham does seem to overstate his case, however, by claiming that early Jews had a clear definition of divine identity that is on par with his own development of this concept.<sup>113</sup> As will be shown below, however, this does not affect the value of Bauckham's concept of divine identity for the purposes of this dissertation. Similarly, another major critique that does not weaken the case made, here, is Bauckham's unwillingness to "illuminate earliest christology through the Jewish tradition of divine agency, and by in effect lumping the Jewish conceptualization of Wisdom under the heading of 'semi-divine intermediary beings.'"<sup>114</sup>

This is a very common objection to Bauckham's work, and stems from his rejection of the more common Christological framework of divine agency, looking to certain figures such as Wisdom, Word, and other divine agents such as angels to explain how early Christians came to believe Jesus was divine. The point of this framework is to show that Jesus was seen as an extension of God, in some sense, similar to how Wisdom and Word were seen in second-temple Jewish literature.<sup>115</sup> As such, belief in Jesus's divinity was not as different to Judaism as was once believed, but, rather, was an evolution, of sorts, of these ancient Jewish concepts. Bauckham does not believe these concepts help in clarifying the New Testament Christology as much as other scholars believe they do, for they do not fully represent the literature. As Bauckham explains,

"Much of the clear evidence for the ways in which Second Temple Judaism understood the uniqueness of God has been neglected in favour of a small amount of highly debatable evidence. Intermediary figures who may or may not participate

---

<sup>113</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?: The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 61.

<sup>114</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 79.

<sup>115</sup> James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in its Jewish Context* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 14-15.

in divinity are by no means characteristic of the literature of Second Temple Judaism. They should not be the focus of a study of Second Temple Judaism. Rather we should proceed by studying the broader evidence of the way the uniqueness of God was understood, and then consider the intermediary figures in the context of this broader evidence.”<sup>116</sup>

As can be seen, Bauckham does not simply reject this biblical framework, but rather acknowledges it, arguing that it is better explained through the broader framework of divine identity. I would agree. However, even if this critique stands, this will not change the main point being addressed, here, namely that second-temple literature viewed God primarily in the sense of who He is, rather than what He is. Furthermore, this critique would mostly affect Bauckham’s interpretation of New Testament Christology, whereas this paper is centered primarily on the identity of the Father.

Perhaps one of the most significant and extensive critiques of Bauckham’s work may be found in James Dunn’s work on the early worship of Jesus.<sup>117</sup> This critique is expressed in three points. First, Dunn argues that the term “identity” is like the term “person,” the meaning of which is not always clear. As such, Dunn fails to understand how Bauckham’s view helps clarify New Testament Christology. Second, Dunn does not believe that there is any real difference between speaking of divine identity and the more traditional view of Jesus “as exercising divine functions.” He argues, however, that the latter manages to avoid the confusion of the first, and as such should be preferred. Lastly, Dunn argues that, if Jesus is, indeed, part of the divine identity, then this identity is partial. His reasoning for this is because, even though Jesus does take part in divine acts, He is never the source, but only an agent. For example, He was the agent of Creation (Jn. 1:3, 10), but He was not the source (1 Cor. 8:6). As such, Dunn concludes that the term

---

<sup>116</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 93-101.

<sup>117</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 141-144.

“equation” is better than “identity,” for it “allows fuller recognition of the other emphases in the New Testament writings – Jesus as Jesus of Nazareth praying to God, Jesus as last Adam and eldest brother in God’s new creation family, Jesus as heavenly intercessor, God as God of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>118</sup>

I believe that the first critique is merely an issue with semantics, which is very similar to the issue with the term “person” in medieval theology but can be answered by properly defining what Bauckham means by this term. Unlike “person,” the meaning of which is more ambiguous and has changed over time, Bauckham begins his work by clearly explaining what he means by this term, namely that second-temple Judaism viewed God primarily as Creator, Sovereign Ruler, and Redeemer. As such, they viewed God primarily for who He is (reflected in His relation to Israel and to all reality), rather than what He is. As will be shown below, this view of divine identity is, indeed, reflected in the biblical texts and other second-temple literature. Furthermore, surely the difficulty in understanding the meaning of the term “person” would not be reason to reject the Trinitarian development that occurred during the first four centuries. As such, even if this critique stands, this should not be reason enough to reject the concept of divine identity, outright. The second critique seems, at least to me, to depend on the initial confusion expressed in the first. However, if there is no confusion, as I believe has been successfully shown, here, then this second critique no longer carries any weight. Any claim that Jesus exercising divine functions is preferable to speaking of divine agency because the former avoids the confusion of the latter is not valid, if there is no confusion to begin with.

The final critique is the stronger of the three, and in a sense is an extension of the criticism outlined, above, regarding the more common Christological framework of intermediary

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 144.

figures. However, ultimately, I believe that this critique fails to grasp the broader point that Bauckham is making, namely that merely taking part in Creation alongside God gives a function or agency to a being that only belongs to God. Bauckham makes a strict delineation between God and all of reality, placing Creation, Sovereignty, and Redemption on the divine side of that dichotomy. Dunn, and others, would argue that intermediary figures fall somewhere in-between this dichotomy, and as such refutes any such dichotomy, at all.<sup>119</sup> Counterexamples to this dichotomy, then, are the figures of Word and Wisdom, and their participation in Creation. However, not only does Bauckham take these figures into account, and shows how they fit within the framework of divine identity, as explained above, Dunn himself recognizes that, in second-temple literature, neither Word nor Wisdom are separate from God, but part of God Himself, or in the case of Wisdom, simply poetic language to speak of God.<sup>120</sup>

This critique is somewhat strange, coming from Dunn, for elsewhere he states that these intermediary figures provide “no precedent to which the first Christians could appeal” for worshipping Jesus.<sup>121</sup> As such, rather than refute Bauckham’s claims, these intermediary figures seem to reinforce them, specifically the dichotomy that Bauckham claims existed between God and all reality. I would agree with McGrath that these figures and divine agents does show that the line was blurrier than what Bauckham wishes to admit.<sup>122</sup> However, it does seem to be the case that, for early Jews and second-temple Judaism, God was unique from everything else that existed, even other gods and divine agents, and only those agents to whom God Himself

---

<sup>119</sup> McClellan, “Cognitive Perspectives on Early Christology,” 651.

<sup>120</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 77, 84, 89.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>122</sup> McGrath, *The Only True God*, 14-15.

conferred a certain level of authority (Ex. 23:21) were able to exercise that authority. As such, although somewhat blurry, the line did, indeed exist, and that is all that is needed to make Bauckham's case. Ultimately, however, although able to withstand criticism, to have any merit, Bauckham's view must be able to find support in the second-temple literature, especially the Bible. As such, a survey of this literature follows.

### Divine Identity in Scripture and Second-Temple Literature

Space does not permit a full defense of Bauckham's framework of divine identity. However, it does seem possible to briefly survey the literature to see how much his view is truly reflected in second-temple Judaism. Of key significance for this survey will be the names or titles of God, especially that of "Lord," and descriptions of God in relation to these names or titles. The reason for this is that this is one of the most prevalent and meaningful ways in which God has chosen to reveal Himself in Scripture.<sup>123</sup> As such, it will be incredibly pertinent to the way in which early Jews viewed God. Simply put, the main question that is being asked, here, is whether this concept of divine identity, as defined by Bauckham, is reflected in the literature in any significant way, or not. Bauckham does not argue that other views of God such as the framework of divine agency are not present in the literature, only that the framework of divine identity is more prevalent and fits better with the evidence. As such, not every passage or second-temple writing needs to be surveyed. Enough needs to be surveyed, however, to begin to form a general idea of how second-temple Judaism viewed God. At the very least, this survey will show that the concept of divine identity was *one* way in which second-temple Judaism viewed God, and that should be enough for the purposes of this chapter.

---

<sup>123</sup> R. L. Saucy, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 504.



In his survey of the divine names, Walter Elwell touches on the meaning and significance of various divine names and titles, and their implications for God's character. When Moses asks for God's name in Exodus 3, for example, Elwell (citing M. Buber and J. Motyer) affirms that Moses is not simply asking for an appellative, but is inquiring into the very character of God.<sup>124</sup> When God reveals the divine name (YHWH), He is not merely offering a title through which He shall be known, nor is the divine name calling attention merely to some external feature, but rather He is revealing who He is, in Himself.<sup>125</sup> This interpretation is shared by the Jewish scholar, Rashi, who affirms that, in revealing His name, God is not to reveal *what* He is, but rather to reveal what He will, and how He will relate to His people.<sup>126</sup> This reflects Bauckham's claim that second-temple Jews viewed God's unique identity through His relation to Israel and to all reality. This interpretation makes more sense of passages such as Exodus 14:4, in which God says, "And the Egyptians will know what I am YHWH." God is speaking about what He will do in Egypt, liberating His chosen people and bringing down punishments upon Israel's oppressors, and affirming that, through this, the Egyptians will know His name. It would seem odd if, by this, God only meant that they would learn His appellative. It seems clear from the context, itself, that God is saying that, through these events, Egypt would learn who He is. The fact that God chose to reveal Himself through the divine name shows that God wants people to know *Him*, and not just His attributes.

Elwell's survey of the divine names also helps illuminate some of the key descriptions of God in the Old Testament. The shortened version of the divine name, *Jah* or *Yah*, for example, is

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 505.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> La Torá con Rashí: Éxodo (Mexico: Editorial Jerusalem de México, 2002), 35.

found numerous times in the formula *halehuya*, which means “praise *yah*.”<sup>127</sup> This points to the worship of a specific Being, rather than to some general concept of Deity. Similarly, *Yahweh Seba’ot* means “Lord of Hosts,” pointing to God’s sovereignty and creative power, which is a key feature in Bauckham’s view of divine identity. Other examples include *El Elyon*, which means “God Most High,” *adonai*, which means “lord,” and *El-Eloe-Yisrael*, which is only used once by Jacob and can mean “El is the God of Israel.” Note how all of these names primarily point to God, Himself, rather than to a particular attribute of God (although this does occur, as well, as in the case of *El Shaddai*, which is usually translated as *the Almighty God*, pointing to God’s power or omnipotence), especially His sovereignty and His relationship to Israel, two key features of Bauckham’s concept of divine identity. Of key significance, however, will be the two most common names of God, namely the divine name, YHWH, and *Elohim*.

The meaning of YHWH is difficult to determine, although as has been seen, above, it is a personal name, exclusive to God, that is used to reveal God Himself. That this is how second-temple Jews viewed God’s name can be confirmed in various second-temple literature, such as the Talmud. For example, *Shemot* 20:21 affirms that, wherever God’s name is mentioned, “I will come and bless you.”<sup>128</sup> In other words, the divine name was synonymous with the very presence of God. Because of its sacredness, over time, Jews tended to avoid, more and more, any attempt at pronouncing the divine name, and instead would substitute the name for *Adonai*, when reading or copying Scripture. As such, *Adonai* became essentially synonymous with the divine name by the time of Jesus (much earlier, in fact), and is the most common name for God in the Old

---

<sup>127</sup> T. E. McComiskey, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 505.

<sup>128</sup> R. Aryeh Coffman, *Las Enseñanzas del Talmud En Yaacob: Berajot I* (Mexico: Editorial Jerusalem de México, 2009), 55.

Testament, with around 6551 appearances.<sup>129</sup> This is incredibly significant for a number of reasons, one of which is the fact that the term *Adonai* means “Lord.” The fact that this is the most common name for God in the Old Testament means that the most common description of God is as *Lord*, pointing to God’s sovereignty over all of Creation which, as explained above, is one of the key elements of the framework of divine identity. It should be noted that, at least from my personal reading of the literature, this title (Lord) is also the most common name for God in non-biblical, second-temple literature such as Baruch, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, and others. In fact, most references to God in the second-temple literature point to either God’s sovereignty, His role as Creator, or His relationship with Israel.<sup>130</sup>

Another key element in Bauckham’s concept of divine identity is the strict dichotomy between God and all reality. As has already been explained, above, Bauckham does seem to overstate the strictness of this dichotomy, but the reality of this dichotomy cannot be denied, and some would argue that it can be seen in the divine name, itself. According to Kendall Soulen, for example, YHWH represents the very identity of God, and “expresses the *particular otherness* of the biblically attested God.”<sup>131</sup> Related to this idea of a dichotomy between God and all reality is, according to Bauckham, the denial (at least in some sense) of other gods (Ex. 20:3). Torrance would agree, affirming that, through His revelation in the divine name, “There is. No other God than this God who makes himself known to mankind and who reveals himself to them in this way, and who thereby denies reality to any other god and discounts any other possible way for

---

<sup>129</sup> Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 686.

<sup>130</sup> Tobit 8:6 (Creator); Judith 4:12 (God of Israel); Wisdom 6:7 (the Sovereign Lord of all), for example.

<sup>131</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, “YHWH the Triune God,” *Modern Theology*, 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1999), 26, 37.

human beings to know him.”<sup>132</sup> This view is also reflected in other second-temple literature in which other gods are viewed as inferior to God, and worship is offered exclusively to the “Lord God,” precisely because He is the Creator, Lord of heaven, and God of Israel.<sup>133</sup> Simply put, it would seem that the divine name and related titles point to much more than God’s attributes, but point to His character, and His relation to Israel and Creation, elements that are essential to Bauckham’s view.

Elwell also argues that the context in which God first reveals the divine name “is to demonstrate that a continuity exists in the divine activity from the time of the patriarchs to the events recorded in Exodus 3.”<sup>134</sup> This truth can be seen in biblical passages in which God identifies Himself as the God of the Patriarchs (Gen. 50:24; Ex. 3:15), as well as in other second-temple literature, in which God is described as the “God of our fathers,” pointing to this idea of continuity.<sup>135</sup> Note the parallels between Elwell’s claim, the biblical narratives in which God reveals Himself as the God of the Patriarchs, and Bauckham’s main definition of “identity.” Bauckham’s definition states that “identity” means, “The personal identity of self-continuity...including both character and personal story (the latter entailing relationships).”<sup>136</sup> He goes on to say, “These are the ways in which we commonly specify ‘who someone is.’”<sup>137</sup> It seems clear that Bauckham’s definition does, in fact, reflect one of the major ways in which God

---

<sup>132</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (London: t&t clark, 2018), 235.

<sup>133</sup> Tobit 1:4-5; 10:11-12; 14:6; Judith 4:12; 6:21; Wisdom 6:7, among many others.

<sup>134</sup> McComiskey, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 507.

<sup>135</sup> Wisdom 9:1; 3 Maccabees 7:16; Prayer of Manasses 1:1.

<sup>136</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 3525.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

chose to reveal Himself in the Old Testament, both through the meaning and purpose of the divine name, and through His own identification as the God of the Patriarchs, the latter pointing to this idea of self-continuity.

The second most common name for God in the Old Testament is *Elohim*, with around 2602 appearances.<sup>138</sup> Although the name itself points to some of the more “transcendental aspects of God’s character,” according to Elwell, “When God is presented in relation to his creation and to the peoples of the earth in the Pentateuch, the name *Elohim* is the name most often used.”<sup>139</sup> In fact, this is the term that is found in the Genesis Creation narrative, portraying God as “the transcendent being, the Creator of the universe.”<sup>140</sup> As mentioned above, Bauckham argues that the primary category through which early Jews viewed God was that of identity, and that this identity was reflected in God’s relation to Israel and to all reality. This seems to be reflected in the name, *Elohim*. In other words, the fact that the second most common name of God in the Old Testament, *Elohim*, is the name that is most often used when God is presented in relation to his creation and to the peoples of the earth, seems to lend strong support to Bauckham’s claim. The two most common divine names, then, are both personal, in nature, point to God’s identity, and at least one is used to reflect God’s relation with people and Creation. Furthermore, on more than one occasion, including when God first revealed His name to Moses, God chose to point to His relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as part of His self-disclosure. Add to this the list of divine names that point to God’s sovereignty and His

---

<sup>138</sup> Edward and Hohlenberger III, *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, 1366.

<sup>139</sup> McComiskey, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 507.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

relationship with Israel, outlined above, and it seems clear that the divine names offer strong support to Bauckham's view of divine identity.

Of similar importance to the divine names is the way in which God is described in the Old Testament. There are many passages that highlight God's essential attributes such as His omnipotence (Job 42:2), omniscience (Psalm 139), and omnipresence (Jeremiah 23:24). However, many more passages highlight God's role as Creator, Redeemer, and His relation with Israel and Creation, too many to list, here. Scripture begins with the Creation account, highlighting God's creative power, sovereignty, and His otherness from all reality. The main thrust of the Old Testament, itself, is God's relationship with Israel, and by extension with the rest of the world. Even those passages that highlight His attributes, such as those mentioned above, tend to be in relational contexts, or closely related to those aspects mentioned by Bauckham. For example, when Job speaks of God's omnipotence, he is summarizing everything that was said in the previous chapters in which God recounted everything He had created, and His sovereignty over all. In this case, then, God's attributes and agency are seen through His role as Creator and sovereign Ruler. Similarly, when Psalm 139 is highlighting God's omniscience, the psalmist is doing so in relation to God's relationship with His chosen king (David), also highlighting God's role in creating him, and, therefore, his sovereignty over him. Lastly, Jeremiah's highlighting of God's omnipresence is done in the context of God's relationship with Israel and other nations, specifically His judgment upon them.

These are just three passages that highlight a broader reality, namely that, even when God's attributes and agency are being highlighted, Scripture does so through the lens of God's role in Creation, His sovereignty, or His relationship with Israel and other nations. The Old Testament emphasis, when describing God, is on who He is, what He has done, and what He will

do, all within a relational context. The same can be said about other second-temple literature, many of which continue the themes that have been laid out in the Bible. For example, as has already been mentioned, the most common title for God in second-temple literature is that of Lord, pointing to His sovereignty. Time and again, many of these authors call God either the “God of Israel,”<sup>141</sup> “God of the fathers,”<sup>142</sup> or very similar phrases. One key distinction between second-temple literature and the Bible is that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the relational emphasis in Scripture is between God and Israel. When using the term “Father,” for example, only once is it ever applied to people, in general. Second-temple literature is much more open to call God “Father” in a general sense, and consistently emphasize His sovereignty over all people, not just Israel.<sup>143</sup> This is also found in Scripture, but to a greater extent is found in the second-temple literature. Similar to Scripture, however, is the second-temple literature’s emphasis on God as Creator,<sup>144</sup> God as the Redeemer of Israel,<sup>145</sup> and God’s unique deity, especially in relation to other supposed gods.<sup>146</sup>

Perhaps even more so than Scripture itself, second-temple literature’s descriptions of God are relational, emphasizing His creative, redemptive, and sovereign power, highlighting His deity, offering worship only to Him, and consistently identifying Him as the very God of the Patriarchs. Simply put, in God’s self-revelation through the divine names, other biblical

---

<sup>141</sup> Judith 4:12.

<sup>142</sup> Wisdom 9:1.

<sup>143</sup> Wisdom 6:7, 5:5; Sirach 4:10; 3 Maccabees 2:2.

<sup>144</sup> Sirach 1:9; 2 Maccabees 7:23.

<sup>145</sup> Baruch 2:11; 1 Maccabees 4:30.

<sup>146</sup> Baruch 6:60-62; Tobit 1:4-5; Judith 8:19.

descriptions such as God's own self-identification as the God of the Patriarchs, and in the second-temple literature descriptions of God, we can find all of the major elements that are included in Bauckham's view of divine identity, offering strong support to his claims.<sup>147</sup> As such, it should be safe to conclude that, at the very least, Bauckham's view of divine identity is reflected in the literature, and is, at least, one of the ways in which second-temple Judaism viewed God. I would agree with Bauckham that this was the primary category in which God was viewed, but it is enough to have shown that it is *one* of the ways in which God was viewed. The question now becomes whether the New Testament authors also had this view in mind, and I will contend that the Pauline Pattern shows that they did.

### **The Pauline Pattern**

One of the most popular passages in the New Testament is John 3:16, in which John says that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." This passage, along many others, is making the claim that Jesus is the Son of God (1 Jn. 5:20; Lk. 1:35; Mt. 14:33). This phrase, "Son of God," is common, clear, and uncontroversial for most Christians. Yet, upon further analysis, this statement is not as simple as it seems, for, who is "God" in this statement? It might seem, to some, that I am attempting to bring confusion to a statement that is not confusing at all. Yet, reading through theology texts and church faith statements shows that there is, in fact, some confusion surrounding this statement, but most are simply not aware of it. For

---

<sup>147</sup> To this brief survey, the passages describing God as *Father*, outlined in the previous chapter, should also be considered. These passages show that the biblical descriptions of God are usually relational, whether it be in relation to Creation, His sovereignty over Creation, and His redeeming relationship with Israel. Rarely does the biblical text use descriptions of God that are aimed solely at highlighting His attributes or divine actions. The latter is much more common than the former, but even then, these actions are almost always related to one of the elements mentioned in Bauckham's view of divine identity, namely God's relation to Israel and all reality (described as Creator, Sovereign Ruler, and Redeemer). Exploring all of these descriptions would have taken much more space than is available, but hopefully this is enough to show that Bauckham's view is, indeed, reflected in the biblical evidence.



example, the declaration of faith for the Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico (IEUPR), the second-largest denomination in Puerto Rico (Catholicism being first), states that “God is the Creator of the universe and of human beings. . .God is one and He reveals Himself as a Triune God. God is one in essence, but reveals Himself in three persons (my translation).”<sup>148</sup> Immediately after declaring that God is triune, it goes on to say that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God; the second person in the Trinity...”<sup>149</sup> Neither statement is confusing, in themselves, but put together, they show one of the problems that is being tackled in this paper, namely a confusion as to the way we speak about God.

In the above statements, God is being called triune, and yet Jesus is being called the Son of God. Is the same God that is being called triune, the same God of whom Jesus is the Son? There is no indication, in the text itself, that this is not the case. Yet, further analysis shows that this cannot possibly be the case, for if God is triune, and Jesus is the Son of God, then the implication is that Jesus is the Son of the triune God. A similar statement can be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). Chapter 2 (Of God, and of the Holy Trinity) begins by affirming the one God, revealed in three Persons, whereas chapter 8 (Of Christ the Mediator) affirms that “It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only-begotten Son.”<sup>150</sup> To be fair, this confession does go into detail as to how Jesus is God, and the second Person of the Trinity, so as to limit the confusion. Nevertheless, the fact remains that two claims are being made, namely that God is triune, and that Jesus is the Son of God, which

---

<sup>148</sup> Sandra García and Fernando Cruz, eds., *Declaración de Fe y Orden de la Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico: Iglesia Evangélica de Puerto Rico, 1999), B.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, C.

<sup>150</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith> (May 12, 2021), last accessed Feb. 13, 2022.

would imply (if not for further clarification) that Jesus is the Son of the Triune God. Similar statements or confessions of faith can be found throughout many Christian denominations, with very little clarification, showing that the meaning of these statements is expected to be understood by fellow Christians.

The point being made here is not that there is a genuine error, mistake, or contradiction in these statements. Nor is it being claimed that these confessions of faith make the claim that Jesus is the Son of the triune God. As is the case with the Westminster Confession of Faith, some attempt is, in fact, made to avoid this implication. However, these statements do show that there is more than one way of speaking about God, and that many Christians jump from one way to another with much ease, never stopping to clarify these different uses, expecting the audience to follow along.<sup>151</sup> The statements “God is triune,” and “Jesus is the Son of God” are not using the term “God” in the same way, and yet many Christians make both statements without any clarification of these two different uses. For this reason, these sorts of statements can be, and are, more confusing than they initially seem, especially for a person who has not taken the time to study the doctrine of the Trinity.

One such way in which “God” is used can be found in the New Testament, especially Paul’s letters. In these letters, Paul establishes what I will call “The Pauline Pattern,” a way of speaking about God, especially in relation to Jesus, that can be very useful in clarifying such confusions as the one highlighted, above. It is through this pattern that statements such as “Son of God” can make any sense. In fact, it will be shown that, without this pattern, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to understand certain uses of “God,” especially in the writings of the early church fathers. It is not my contention that this is the ultimate lens through which we

---

<sup>151</sup> William Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 246.

should always interpret the term “God.” However, as will be shown, this pattern is an important “starting-off” point, from which we can begin to identify and delineate further uses of the term “God.” Furthermore, it will be argued that this pattern reflects the concept of divine identity that has been defended, thus far, ultimately offering a more developed answer to the question, “Who is the Father?”

### The Pauline Pattern, Explained

As has been mentioned, above, in second-temple Judaism, the divine name (YHWH) was essentially replaced by the title, Lord.<sup>152</sup> As such, by far the most common name for God in the Old Testament was *Lord*, and this is a fact that was not unknown to Paul.<sup>153</sup> Given the second-temple context of the New Testament, in fact, it should be safe to assume that this fact was known to all New Testament authors. As such, it is of special significance that, especially for Paul, the title “Lord” is the preferred title to refer to Jesus. This might not be as significant if it occurred only a few times, but, according to Dunn, in the so-called “undisputed” Pauline letters, alone, “Lord” is used by Paul for Jesus about 200 times.<sup>154</sup> My own count of all Pauline letters, disputed or otherwise, yields a number far greater than this. This title is so significant in Paul’s writings that, Garland concludes, “That Jesus is *our Lord* is central to all that Paul believes and also sums up his preaching.”<sup>155</sup> Many times, calling Jesus *Lord* seems to simply be out of love or

---

<sup>152</sup> Jason A. Staples, “Lord, Lord: Jesus as YHWH in Matthew and Luke,” *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 63, no. 1 (Jan. 2018), 6.

<sup>153</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 2386.

<sup>154</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 103.

<sup>155</sup> David E. Garland, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical Theological Exposition of the Holy Scripture; 2 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 59.

reverence (Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 3:11). Other times, however, the title seems to be implying that Jesus, Himself, is none other than *the* Lord, YHWH (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 10:21; Phil. 2:10-11; 2 Thess. 1:7).

Given the first century understanding of the title “Lord,” in this context, there is no reason to assume that Paul did not understand the implications of his prevalent use of the title in reference to Jesus. The fact that he never takes the time to clarify some other meaning, thereby avoiding the implication that Paul was equating Jesus with YHWH, is significant. This latter point becomes even more significant when Old Testament passages that speak about YHWH (Lord) are quoted, by Paul, and applied to Jesus, our Lord (Rom. 10:13, 1 Cor. 2:16). In doing so, Paul is essentially stating that the very same Lord mentioned in these passages is the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom he is speaking. It is for this reason that Wainwright believes that the title “Lord,” in the New Testament, was transferred from YHWH to Jesus.<sup>156</sup> The use of this title, in fact, has historically been one of the main lines of argument in defense of the Trinity, pointing to its significance.

However, what is being presented, here, is not a defense of Jesus as Lord, nor is this an attempt to use this title to show that Jesus is somehow God, although this is an argument that many Trinitarians make.<sup>157</sup> It is merely one of the implications of the pattern, itself. The Pauline Pattern does not consist merely of Jesus being called *Lord*, rather in the insistence of distinguishing between the titles “Lord” and “God,” when speaking about Jesus and the Father, respectively. Throughout his letters, whenever Paul mentions Jesus and the Father in close proximity to one another, he tends to use the title “Lord” *exclusively* for Jesus, while reserving

---

<sup>156</sup> Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, 89.

<sup>157</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 384.

the title “God” for the Father.<sup>158</sup> That this is a pattern, and not mere coincidence, may be seen, first, in the fact that it is one of the defining characteristics of Paul’s greetings, both to open and close most of his letters (Rom. 1:7; 16:20; 2 Cor. 1:2; 13:14; Gal. 1:1; 6:16, 18; Phi. 1:2; 4:21-23). Time and again, Paul greets and closes out his letters by calling to “God our Father,” and “the Lord Jesus Christ.” The consistency of this greeting shows that this was characteristic of Paul, rather than a just an interesting phrase that happens to appear in some of his letters.

Another reason for affirming that this is a pattern is the sheer number of times in which it appears in Paul’s letters, with no notable exceptions. Only when citing specific Old Testament passages (Rom. 4:8; 9:28-29; 12:19; 1 Cor. 1:31; 3:20; 2 Cor. 6:17-18) does Paul use the title “Lord” to refer to God or the Father, and even here this is not always clearly the case.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, only a couple of controversial passages seem to use the title “God” in reference to Christ (Rom. 9:5; Phi. 2:5-6), but, since there is no consensus as to whether these passages do, in fact, call Jesus God, they cannot definitively be used as counterexamples to the pattern. Even so, these would only amount to a handful of exceptions, in comparison to the hundreds of times that conform to this pattern. Given the fact that Paul uses these two titles so often throughout his letters, even when only considering the so-called “undisputed” letters, this consistency in using the titles “Lord” and “God” for Jesus and the Father, respectively, is remarkable. Too remarkable, in fact, to be a mere coincidence. Furthermore, another reason we can know that this is an actual pattern is the fact that it is most prominent in Paul. In the rest of the New Testament, while one could argue that these authors did follow a general pattern of calling Jesus *Lord*, and the Father *God*, there are many more exceptions to this rule, and much less consistency. The

---

<sup>158</sup> The only apparent exception to this rule is when citing particular Old Testament passages that reference the Lord (YHWH). In these cases, God, the Father, is called Lord, rather than Jesus.

<sup>159</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 34.

book of Hebrews, for example, regularly cites the Old Testament, and as such typically calls God, *Lord*. This does not break with the Pauline Pattern, per se, but because of this prevalence of the Old Testament in Hebrews, it is more difficult to establish the pattern. Similarly, James regularly calls God *Lord* (1:7; 3:9; 5:4), while also calling Jesus *Lord* (1:1; 2:1). Peter usually calls Jesus *Lord*, but also seems to call Him *God* (1:1), and some uses of the title, Lord, are not clear to whom they are referring (2 Pe. 2:9, 11; 3:8-9). John's three letters do not use the title "Lord" at all, and Jude uses the title for both Jesus and the Father (1:4; 1:9).

As can be seen, then, while sharing a general practice of calling Jesus *Lord*, and the Father *God*, the non-Pauline New Testament letters do not follow a pattern in a strict sense, to the point that, if Paul's letters were to be absent, it would be difficult to establish any sort of pattern, at all. As such, this pattern seems to be exclusive to Paul, although it may have carried over to other authors who followed it, loosely. The same is true for the church fathers, as will be shown, below. However, even though a specific and consistent pattern cannot be shown, outside of Paul, it is, nevertheless, true that, in the New Testament, God was understood to be the Father, and Jesus was understood to be His Son, even by those authors, such as John, who clearly affirmed that Jesus is divine. It is also true that the title, "Lord," in the New Testament is most consistently used of Jesus. Even the practice of applying Old Testament passages to Jesus, implying that Jesus was the very same Lord of the Old Testament, can be found outside of Paul (Mt. 3:3). The Pauline Pattern, then, while not present in the rest of the New Testament (outside of Paul) in a strict sense, is consistent with the New Testament, and no New Testament author directly contradicts it. As such, in the New Testament, almost always refers to the Father, the title "God" almost always refers to the Father, whereas "Lord" almost always refers to Christ.

Given the Pauline Pattern, and the general practice of these two titles in the New Testament, it is my contention that, unless otherwise indicated by the context, the term “God,” in the New Testament, should always be understood to be referring to the Father. Support for this contention may be found in the previous chapter in which the term “Father,” itself, was discussed. As was shown, there, whenever Christ or one of the New Testament authors spoke about God, the first-century audience would have understood them to be referring to YHWH. Similarly, whenever the Father is mentioned, especially by Jesus, the first-century audience would have understood this to be in reference to YHWH. For the first-century audience, then, the Father was God, and God was YHWH.<sup>160</sup> It would be extremely difficult to argue otherwise, especially given the second-temple context discussed in the previous chapter, the centrality of the Shema for first-century Jews, and the prevalence of the Pauline Pattern discussed, here.

The truth and value of this pattern as an interpretive lens through which to understand certain passages about God can be seen in the phrase, “Son of God,” mentioned at the beginning of this section. In this phrase, as in the Pauline Pattern, “God” refers to “the Father.” This conclusion seems obvious given the term “Son,” which implies that God is the Son’s Father. However, the implication is that this title almost always refers to the Father, not just in a phrase such as this one. Furthermore, as was also shown, above, there *can* be some confusion surrounding this term, particularly when discussed within modern theological contexts, which usually use the term in a trinitarian sense (referring to the triune God, rather than any specific Person). In such contexts, more than one sense of “God” is being applied, without making a clear distinction between these various senses. In the New Testament, however, the most prevalent way of speaking about God was in reference to the Father, who is YHWH. For Paul, then, as for

---

<sup>160</sup> Soulen, “YHWH the Triune God,” 45.

the New Testament authors and audience, “God” (the Father) is equivalent to “YHWH,” and Jesus is YHWH’s Son. It is very important to understand that this was the common practice, in the first few centuries, to avoid reading into certain passages in a trinitarian context that was not originally intended. For many of the first-century audience, this distinction between God and Jesus was not meant to be explicitly trinitarian, even though there are trinitarian implications in these titles. As stated by Dunn, the title “Lord” was “not so much [a] way of *identifying* Jesus with God, as a way of *distinguishing* Jesus from God.”<sup>161</sup>

The reasons for this pattern become clear once it is seen through the religious context in which the pattern emerged. For example, as already mentioned, the title “Lord” was typically understood, in religious circles (especially Jewish) as a substitute and equivalent to the divine name. Given the fact that it is also one of the most common titles for Jesus and is rarely used in the New Testament to refer to God, this could have become problematic and confusing, for some. For example, in passages in which the subject is not entirely clear (Rom. 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:18), and the title “Lord” is being used, how would the reader understand who is being spoken of? Is the Lord, in these passages, Jesus, or YHWH?<sup>162</sup> Without further context or clarification, the answer to this question would not always be clear. Furthermore, although the New Testament authors did seem to believe that Jesus was, in some sense, YHWH, as well, it is clear they believed in some sort of hierarchy between the two, namely God, the Father (first), and the Son Jesus Christ (second). This hierarchy is prevalent throughout the entire New Testament and in

---

<sup>161</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 110.

<sup>162</sup> I am looking at this solely from a first-century perspective, not from a trinitarian perspective in which we understand that Jesus is also, in some sense, YHWH. In other words, when I say “Jesus, or YHWH,” I do not mean to imply that Jesus is not YHWH, only that the original audience would have made such a distinction and would have needed further clarification. A similar point will be made when looking at the writings of the early church fathers, to show that this confusion is a real one.



trinitarian theology and is one of the reasons for why some early Christians mistakenly understood Jesus to be inferior to the Father, affirming subordinationist or adoptionist Christologies.

In trinitarian theology, and in the New Testament, God, the Father, is usually mentioned first, and then Jesus, and finally the Holy Spirit. As such, the New Testament authors seem to have needed a way to make a distinction between the two, while not denying that Jesus was God, as well. This is where I believe the Pauline Pattern comes in. Simply put, the Pauline Pattern allowed for the title “Lord” to be used of Jesus without any confusion as to its implications, maintaining a distinction between Jesus and God, while not denying His deity. It is for this reason that I reaffirm that, unless the context indicates otherwise, the term “God,” in the New Testament, should always be interpreted as referring to the Father, whereas “Lord” is usually reserved for Jesus. This is the pattern that Paul establishes in order to avoid confusion and ignoring this pattern can make trinitarian theology more confusing than it needs to be. This interpretive lens, then, while not absolute, is an important place to begin, before attempting to delineate between other uses of the title “God.”<sup>163</sup> This is especially true when reading the works of the early church fathers, as will now be discussed.

### The Pauline Pattern in the Early Church Fathers

There is much context that is going to necessarily be left out of this section, the main reason being that it would be an impossible task to read through *all* the writings of the early

---

<sup>163</sup> What I mean by “absolute,” here, is that the Pauline Pattern is not the way in which we should *always* use the term “God,” outside of the New Testament. In other words, “God” is not exclusive to “The Father,” especially in trinitarian theology, and does have other meanings. It can refer to the triune God, for example, to YHWH, to the Father, to Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit. As will be argued in the next chapter, it can also be used to refer to the essential attributes of Deity. However, without the Pauline Pattern as a starting-off point, interpreting the many uses of “God” can be difficult. As such, I am arguing that we should begin with how the New Testament uses this title (the Pauline Pattern) and allow context to guide us into other interpretations.

church fathers, in search for something as specific as the Pauline Pattern. This would be a worthy task, however, one that this paper hopes to begin. After searching through various secondary sources that discuss the writings of the church fathers, however, I was able to survey those writings that are directly relevant to trinitarian theology. From that list, representative texts have been chosen, and have been put under three primary categories. First, there are those writings that conform to the Pauline Pattern. Second, there are those that do not conform. Lastly, there are those that are ambiguous, meaning those writings in which the subject (when using the titles “Lord” and “God”) is not entirely clear.

It is not my intention to establish the Pauline Pattern in the writings of the early church fathers, but, rather, to show that, without this pattern as a starting-off point, it would be very difficult to understand many of the writings of the early church fathers. As such, the category that is most relevant to this section of the dissertation is that of those writings that are ambiguous. It is my contention that the Pauline Pattern can help clarify many of these texts, and that, without this pattern, it would be nearly impossible to understand some of them. This strengthens the value of the Pauline Pattern as an initial interpretive lens through which to understand early trinitarian discussions, before delving deeper and delineating between more complex theological implications. If this is the case, then this pattern can then be used to further the discussion surrounding the question, “Who is the Father?”

The so-called Apostles’ Creed, while being a work of the sixth century, in its final form, is believed by many to truly contain the teachings and beliefs of the apostolic age.<sup>164</sup> It begins by establishing the classic trinitarian formula, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, [and] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,” and later affirms that Jesus “is

---

<sup>164</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*: Volume I (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1949), 24.

seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.”<sup>165</sup> Similarly, the Didache, representing very early Christian thought, begins by affirming and paraphrasing the two great commandments (Mt. 22:37-39), stating, “Thou shalt love the God who made thee,” and then continuing by stating that, “For the Father’s will is that we give to all from the gifts we have received.”<sup>166</sup> The text then proceeds to use the titles “God” and “Lord” throughout, in contrast to one another, rather than interchangeably, before making it clear that “the Lord” is the one who “commanded in His Gospel, like this: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.”<sup>167</sup> Particularly interesting is the fact that, in chapter four of the Didache, God, the Lord, and the Spirit are all mentioned, in that order, before offering the baptismal formula in chapter 7, “in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit,” implying that “God” corresponds to “Father,” “Lord” corresponds to “Son,” and “Spirit” corresponds to “Holy Spirit.” This is not an imaginative interpretation of the text, given its frequent references to the Father as God (Ch. 1 and 9), and to Jesus as Lord (Ch. 8). It is not insignificant that the earliest writings, after the New Testament, are the most similar to the Pauline Pattern, compared to the later writings.

Clement of Rome follows a similar pattern to Paul in the salutation of his first epistle, namely beginning with a salutation “by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>168</sup> The letter goes on to speak of God, God Almighty, and the commandments of God throughout, once again assuming that the original audience would have understood who was being spoken of

---

<sup>165</sup> *The Apostles’ Creed*, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed>, last accessed February 16, 2022, ch. 1.

<sup>166</sup> *The Didache*, I:2,5.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 8.

<sup>168</sup> Clement of Rome, *First Epistle*, [https://ccel.org/ccel/clement\\_rome/first\\_epistle\\_to\\_the\\_corinthians](https://ccel.org/ccel/clement_rome/first_epistle_to_the_corinthians), Ch. I.

(YHWH). Unlike Paul, Clement of Rome's epistle frequently uses the title "Lord" in reference to God, the Father, rather than Jesus.<sup>169</sup> However, each of these uses are in the context of Old Testament references, such as Noah, Lot, and Rahab. As such, this would fit with Paul's use of the term "Lord" to refer to God, when citing Old Testament passages. Outside of the Old Testament context, such as in the salutation and chapter sixteen, Christ is once again referred to as "Lord," and is contrasted with "God." For example, he states, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Sceptre of the majesty of God,"<sup>170</sup> and again, "Let us rather offend those men who are foolish...than [offend] God. Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us."<sup>171</sup>

Ignatius offers a similar practice as that of Clement and Paul in each of his greetings, consistently greeting his intended audience in the name of "God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>172</sup> Not all of Ignatius's greetings include the title "Lord," in reference to Christ, but later in the letter he consistently identifies the Lord of his greeting as Jesus. Of these early church fathers, Ignatius is one of the most consistent in using the Pauline Pattern, nearly always using the titles "God" and "Lord" for the Father and the Son, respectively.<sup>173</sup> Irenaeus is similarly consistent, following a similar pattern in his greetings,<sup>174</sup> and adding certain phrases that assume

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., Chs. 8-12, especially.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. Ch. 16.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., Ch. 21.

<sup>172</sup> Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-philadelphians-roberts.html>, last accessed February 16, 2022, Ch. 0. This is just one example, but each of his seven letters include such a greeting.

<sup>173</sup> I do not mean, by this, that Ignatius necessarily knew of the Pauline Pattern, but the pattern is, nevertheless, present consistently in his letters, which implies more than coincidence.

<sup>174</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* (Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012), 28.

this pattern, such as “Word of God,” which he later interchanges with “Word of the Father.”<sup>175</sup>

Origen’s work is a bit more controversial than those works that have been discussed, thus far, but he nevertheless affirms that the teachings of the Apostles was, “That there is one God...[who] sent our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>176</sup> Saint Polycarp of Smyrna also offers a similar greeting to those mentioned, above, “From God Almighty, and from the Lord Jesus Christ,” and consistently makes a distinction between “God” and “the Lord,” especially as it relates to the Resurrection.<sup>177</sup> The anonymous “Martyrdom of Polycarp” follows a similar practice to Polycarp’s letter, which is to be expected, given that it was likely written by a disciple of Polycarp.<sup>178</sup>

Thus far, then, all these examples show that, to varying degrees, the early church fathers did follow a general pattern, very similar (if not identical, at times, as in the case of Ignatius) to the Pauline Pattern. However, there are notable exceptions, some of which clearly go against the pattern, and some that are simply too ambiguous to tell. For example, very early on, some of the church fathers were not hesitant to call Jesus “God.” Origen, for example, both implies and says outright that Jesus is God, multiple times, while at the same time affirming that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>179</sup> He also uses the title of “Lord” for God, the Father, although it is more commonly used for Jesus.<sup>180</sup> Irenaeus follows a similar practice, not hesitating to affirm that Jesus is God,

---

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>176</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* (Fig, 2012), 32.

<sup>177</sup> St. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians*, [https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/epistle\\_to\\_the\\_philippians](https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/epistle_to_the_philippians), Salutation.

<sup>178</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, [https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/martyrdom\\_of\\_polycarp](https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/martyrdom_of_polycarp), Salutation.

<sup>179</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, 22, 43, 115.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 146, 276.

and that the Father is Lord.<sup>181</sup> It should be noted, however, that, for the most part, when the Father is called “Lord,” it usually occurs either within the context of the Old Testament, or in reference to His creative and sovereign rule over Creation.<sup>182</sup> As such, while not exactly following the Pauline Pattern, these examples do not necessarily contradict this pattern, either. Far more common are the uses of the titles “God” and “Lord” in which the subject is simply not explicitly identified, and as such it cannot be determined definitively whether they conform to the Pauline Pattern, or not. For example, the Didache states, “My child, remember night and day him who speaks the word of God to you, and honor him as you do the Lord. For wherever the lordly rule is uttered, there is the Lord.”<sup>183</sup> In this statement, it is not entirely clear whether “God” and “the Lord” refer the same subject, or whether they are referring to two different subjects. If the latter, how do we determine who are the subjects of each title?

A further example of this lack of clarity can be found in Clement of Rome’s phrase, “commandments of God,” which would not be problematic, in itself, if not for the later phrase, “The commandments and ordinance of the Lord.”<sup>184</sup> These two statements could be seen as interchangeable, but they could also be referring to two different subjects, namely the Father and Jesus, respectively. Once again, how would the reader go about determining which interpretation is correct? Clement also, at times, offers a double-use of the title “Lord,” perhaps following a trinitarian interpretation of Old Testament passages in which the double-Lord is used (Psalm

---

<sup>181</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 31, 92.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, 201, 213.

<sup>183</sup> *The Didache*, Ch. 4.

<sup>184</sup> Clement of Rome, *First Epistle*, Ch. 1, 4, respectively.

110:1), applying this title to both God, the Father, and Jesus Christ.<sup>185</sup> Without a specific interpretive lens, however, it would be difficult to determine if this is, in fact, Clement's intentions. Even Ignatius, one of the early church fathers that most consistently follows the Pauline Pattern, at times is unclear in his use of these titles, as when he says, "Let not widows be neglected. After the Lord be thou their protector."<sup>186</sup> No attempt is made to clarify who "the Lord" is, in this teaching, apparently assuming that his audience would understand. The Cappadocian Fathers seem to have attempted to bring some clarity to this issue, having the advantage of having written much later than many of the church fathers mentioned, in a post-Nicene context. As such, Basil of Caesarea can claim, for example, that Jesus is "our God,"<sup>187</sup> or the "only-begotten God,"<sup>188</sup> while at the same time maintaining a distinction between "the Lord" and "the Father."<sup>189</sup> Similarly, Saint Basil interprets many biblical passages through a trinitarian lens, commenting on Jesus' words, "No one comes to the Father but through me," by saying that, "Such is our way up to God 'through the Son.'" This comment points to a certain equivocation between "Father" and "God," which conforms to the Pauline Pattern, but in a much more trinitarian context.<sup>190</sup> Lastly, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, time and again, interprets Old Testament passages in a trinitarian context, and teaches that "God" is actually the triune God, attempting,

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. Ch. 24.

<sup>186</sup> Ignatius, *To Polycarp*, Ch. 4:1.

<sup>187</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 81.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>190</sup> Saint Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* (Digireads.com Publishing, 2020), 26.

then, to clarify the internal relations between the three Persons.<sup>191</sup> This latter use of “God” is radically different from the Pauline Pattern, and reflects, much more, the later sense in which this title is used, namely to refer to the triune God, rather than any of the three Persons, specifically.

This survey shows that, aside from the general following of the Pauline Pattern, perhaps one of the most consistent elements in the writings of the early church fathers is the constant references to God, or the Lord, without further clarification as to who the subject is. The authors seem to assume that their audience would simply understand who is being addressed, and, as such, did not feel the need to explain the meaning of these terms. These authors seem to have been correct, as, for the most part, most Christians, even today, have no problem understanding who is being spoken of in many of these writings. For example, when Ignatius says, “After the Lord be thou their protector,” most Christians would likely, and rightly, assume that Ignatius is referring to Jesus. Similarly, when an author speaks of “God Almighty,” or “the Creator,” most Christians will assume, rightly, that the author is speaking of the Father, or YHWH. I would contend, however, that without assuming a practice like the Pauline Pattern, these assumptions have no basis, and it would be incredibly difficult to understand the meaning of many of the writings of the early church fathers.

Simply put, then, it seems that most Christians assume a Pauline Pattern, even when they have never heard of the term, before. Given the prevalence of the Pauline Pattern in the New Testament, and the many examples that conform to this pattern in the writings of the early church fathers, when it comes to those uses of the titles “God” and “Lord” in which the subject is not always clear, it seems that the safest and easiest way to avoid confusion would be to begin with the interpretive lens of the Pauline Pattern, and then allow context to delineate other

---

<sup>191</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and the Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 23.



possible interpretations. When the Epistle of Barnabas states, “I do rejoice over your blessed and glorious spirit for the greatness and richness of God’s ordinances towards you,” the best interpretation is that that “God” refers to the Father. Similarly, when it goes on to say, “The Spirit has been poured out upon you from the Lord,” the best interpretation is that “Lord” refers to Jesus. When the Didache mentions those that preach “the word of God,” and asks Christians to honor that person “as you do the Lord,” the best interpretation is to say that “God” is the Father, and “the Lord” is Jesus Christ. This interpretive lens is not without merit or precedent, in fact, for Tertullian, writing in the late second and early third centuries, says, “But I shall follow the apostle; so that if the Father and the Son, are alike to be invoked, I shall call the Father ‘God,’ and invoke Jesus Christ as ‘Lord.’ But when Christ alone [is mentioned], I shall be able to call Him ‘God.’”<sup>192</sup>

Tertullian is, here, referring to the “problem” raised by his opponents regarding the fact that there are two Gods and two Lords, referring to the Father and the Son rightfully holding both titles. He recognizes the confusion that may occur in the use of these titles for all three Persons of the Trinity, and as such proposes the elegant solution of using the title “God” to refer to the Father, and “Lord” to refer to Jesus, when speaking of them, together. The most incredible aspect of this proposition is the grounding of it in the practice of Paul, which confirms one of the claims being made, here, namely that this practice was, in fact, a Pauline Pattern, and not mere coincidence. Furthermore, Tertullian is, here, recognizing the very interpretive problems that have been mentioned, thus far, regarding the many uses of these titles, especially those uses in which the subject is not entirely clear. As such, it would seem that Tertullian was aware of these

---

<sup>192</sup> Tertullian, “Against Praxeas,” *Early Church Theology* (Fig, 2012), Ch. 13.

issues, was aware of the Pauline Pattern (in some sense) and offered the very same solution that is being proposed, here.

In conclusion, the Pauline Pattern is very much present in many of the works of the early church fathers, especially those closest to when Paul's letters were first written. Within certain trinitarian discussions, this pattern is disrupted by calling Jesus "God," and using the title "Lord" to refer to either the Father or the Son. Usually, however, the Father is called "Lord" within the context of Old Testament passages, or in relation to Creation and His sovereign rule, which also fits with the Pauline Pattern. Where the Pauline Pattern becomes incredibly useful is in those writings in which the subject is not always clear. In these cases, the best practice seems to be to assume that "God" refers to the Father, and "Lord" refers to Jesus, unless something within the context itself indicates otherwise, which aligns with Tertullian's own proposed solution. Using the Pauline Pattern as an interpretive lens for the writings of the early church fathers offers much clarity on certain statements and allows for a better understanding of the evolution of trinitarian theology.

It seems clear that trinitarian theology begins with the assumption that YHWH is God, the Father, and that Jesus is God's Son. From here, trinitarian theology moves on to explaining how these relationships work, and how Jesus can also be God without resorting to polytheism. This pattern can be seen in the writings, themselves, beginning with the clearest expression of the Pauline Pattern in Scripture, and as trinitarian theology developed further, the church fathers used these titles, more and more, for both the Father and the Son, and even the Holy Spirit, as evidenced in the Cappadocian Fathers. The Pauline Pattern, then, not only allows for a helpful framework through which to explain the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, but it helps explain what the early church fathers believed, and how these beliefs grounded their trinitarian

thought. One of the main points in this entire discussion has been to show that the Pauline Pattern is real, present in both the New Testament and in the writings of the early church fathers, and that one of the implications of this pattern is that, for the most part, “God” was essentially synonymous with “the Father,” up until the fourth century. This is an incredibly significant implication, relevant to the question about the identity of the Father. Having established the Pauline Pattern, and showing its relevance to trinitarian development, the question now becomes, how does the Pauline Pattern fit with the broader concept of divine identity, presented here? That discussion now follows.

### **The Pauline Pattern and Divine Identity**

Thus far, this chapter has centered on establishing Bauckham’s view of divine identity, and the Pauline Pattern, both of which influenced the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in different ways. In the first section, the main argument was that second-temple Judaism viewed God primarily through the categories of His relation to Israel, and His relation to all reality. Simply put, second-temple Judaism was more centered on who God is, rather than what He is. In the previous section, the main argument has been simply to establish that the Pauline Pattern exists, primarily in Paul’s letters, but also in the non-Pauline New Testament letters, and in the writings of the early church fathers, to varying degrees. This pattern seems to have been developed for the purpose of finding a way to speak about Jesus in such a way as to maintain His deity, while also maintaining a distinction between He and the Father. This is of particular importance when speaking about both, together, especially when using the titles “God” and “Lord.”

One of the major implications of the Pauline Pattern is that, generally speaking, both in the New Testament and in the writings of the early church fathers, the title of “God” was taken to

be virtually synonymous with the Father, oftentimes used interchangeably. Clement, for example, speaks of “One God and one Christ [and] one Spirit.”<sup>193</sup> Similarly, Saint Basil speaks of “One God and Father, one Only-begotten, and one Holy Ghost.”<sup>194</sup> Basil also goes on to make an entire argument about the phrases “through whom” and “of whom,” arguing that the former applies to the Father. Yet, within this argument, Basil jumps back and forth between the titles “God” and “Father,” arguing that “It will be granted that ‘through whom’ is properly used of God.”<sup>195</sup> For Basil, then, the two titles are essentially synonymous. A similar practice can be seen in Gregory of Nazianzus’s orations, which is significant given the time in which these orations were written, namely post-Nicene era. As such, if Gregory would have wanted to, he had the necessary vocabulary to make the distinction between “God” and “the Father” clearer. Yet, his Oration 28 is titled “On the Doctrine of God,” whereas Orations 29 and 31 are titled “On the Son,” and “On the Holy Spirit,” respectively.<sup>196</sup> It is clear, then, that for him, “God” was the equivalent of “the Father.”

All these examples reflect that common practice of using the trinitarian formula established by Jesus in Matthew 28:19. Yet, Jesus teaches the formula “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” whereas many church fathers would say, “God, Son, and Holy Spirit,” or some other variation of this. As such, it is safe to conclude that, in general, the title “God” was virtually synonymous with “the Father,” except in certain cases where the title is applied to the other Persons of the Trinity, or in reference to the Trinity, as a whole. Furthermore, the Father,

---

<sup>193</sup> Clement, *First Epistle*, ch. 46.

<sup>194</sup> Saint Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 54.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>196</sup> “On the Son” takes up two orations, namely 29 and 30. The threefold division between these orations, however, is clear.

Himself, was most closely identified with YHWH, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, whereas Jesus was more commonly identified as the Son of God. The title of “God,” then, was also virtually synonymous with the divine name. However, given the fact that Jesus was also, in some sense, identified with YHWH, even taking on the divine titles of “God” and “Lord,” the trinitarian discussion during the first four centuries revolved primarily around attempting to explain how this can be the case. The Nicene Creed, in fact, to an extent can be seen as the culmination of this centuries-long discussion, affirming belief in “One God, the Father almighty...[and] one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God. . .[and] in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>197</sup>

As can be seen, this formula does not stray from the many sayings of the church fathers, and the trinitarian formula established by Jesus Himself, and perfectly reflects everything that has been said, thus far, about the Pauline Pattern. However, much of the discussion that occurred during these centuries can still be very confusing and difficult to understand, given the complexities of the issue and the technical language that was characteristic of the time. For example, much of trinitarian discussion during these centuries centered on terminology such as “createdness” and “uncreatedness,” “begotten” and “unbegottenness,” the relation between “eternal” and “unbegottenness,” the meaning of “person,” or “hypostasis,” or “being,” etc. Many of these terms must be understood within the context of the time, in fact, to understand them, at all. Thanks to these discussions and emphases on the technical aspects of the Trinity, much progress in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity occurred during these centuries, perhaps more progress than at any point, thereafter. However, it seems that there is a much easier way to understand these relationships, and even understand the discussion, as a whole; one that is

---

<sup>197</sup> “Nicene Creed,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nicene-Creed>, last accessed February 19, 2022.

presented to us in Scripture, itself, but that, for some reason, has gone ignored for far too long: divine identity.

As has been seen, the concept of divine identity was at least one of the ways in which second-temple Judaism viewed God, and, therefore, forms part of the theological context of the New Testament. As such, it would be very helpful to attempt to view the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly its development, through this lens, as the authors of the New Testament might have done, themselves. In the following section, I will argue that the Pauline Pattern reflects this concept of divine identity, that it can help clarify the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to YHWH, and that, as such, it can be used to clarify certain aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity, as a whole. One key area in which this concept of divine identity will be helpful is in addressing the main question of this very dissertation, namely “Who is the Father?” With this important context in mind, we will now begin by looking at how Paul applied his pattern to one of the most central teachings within Judaism, namely, the Shema.

#### Paul and the Shema

Richard Bauckham’s argument for what he calls “Christological monotheism,” which is grounded in the second-temple concept of divine identity defended, here, reaches its climax in 1 Corinthians 8:6.<sup>198</sup> Bauckham argues that, for Paul, Jesus (as well as the Father) was part of the identity of YHWH. He cites quite a few verses that show this, but the strongest example, for Bauckham, is Paul’s allusion to the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8. It is important, first, to understand Paul’s context and purpose within this chapter before attempting to determine whether Bauckham is correct, or not. Paul is responding to certain issues that had been brought to his

---

<sup>198</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 2656.

attention, presumably by the Corinthian Christians, themselves. The issue being discussed, here, is whether Christians could or should eat food that had been previously sacrificed to idols (v. 1). In response to this question, Paul begins by affirming the main principle of the Shema, namely that “there is no God but one” (v. 4). As such, the immediate context for verse six is idolatry versus Christian monotheism.<sup>199</sup> The broader context would be Jewish monotheism, represented and affirmed in the Shema, the divine name, and the general practice of substituting the divine name with “Lord.” All these elements form part of Paul’s theological context, and as such cannot be separated from the text, itself.

Paul’s initial argument, then, is that there is only one God. As such, any food that has been sacrificed to idols, in actuality has been sacrificed to nothing, for there is no God but one (v. 4).<sup>200</sup> Paul, then, expounds on this principle, and states that, even if others believe in “so-called gods...yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (v. 6). This is where the previous context becomes essential, for Paul had just alluded to the Shema, his main argument is that there is only one God (YHWH), and as justification for this he explains that, even if there are more gods, for them there is only “one God” and “one Lord,” referring to the Father and the Son, respectively. For Bauckham, what Paul is doing here is “including Jesus in the unique identity of the one God affirmed in the Shema.”<sup>201</sup> This is the only way, according to Bauckham, that Paul’s statements, here, can be

---

<sup>199</sup> Mark Taylor, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture; 1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 205-206.

<sup>200</sup> Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 73.

<sup>201</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 4302.

interpreted within the monotheistic context in which he is stating them. For Dunn, however, “It is quite possible to argue, alternatively, that Paul took up the *Shema*, already quoted in 8:4, only in the first clause of 8:6; and to that added the *further* confession, ‘and one Lord Jesus Christ.’”<sup>202</sup>

The problem with Dunn’s proposition is that it does not fit the context and purpose of the previous verses. If Paul’s main argument is that there is but one God, it is not entirely clear how adding the affirmation “one Lord Jesus Christ” helps further this argument. It does not seem immediately clear where the affirmation of Christ’s Lordship enters the argument for one God, or how this would prove to the Corinthians that idols are not real, or how this claim is related to the *Shema*, at all. This is also why the broader context of the divine name was mentioned, above, for Paul’s allusion to the *Shema*, which affirms the divine name, immediately followed by his use of the title, “Lord,” would have created nothing but confusion for first-century Jews and Christians. Paul knew the meaning of the title “Lord” within this particular religious context and knew that the divine name in the *Shema* would have been substituted for this title, and as such would have known that affirming “one God” and “one Lord,” within this context, would have been confusing and problematic, unless it was being stated within an even broader interpretive context. It is my contention, per Bauckham, that this broader interpretive context is the second-temple view of divine identity. As such, I agree with Bauckham that, unless Paul’s words would have been understood as including Jesus and the Father within the unique identity of YHWH, then he would have been understood as teaching some sort of ditheism. In other words, it would not make sense for Paul to combat idolatry or polytheism by affirming two Persons or Beings, namely the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, unless, somehow, these two Persons were part of the one identity of the one God affirmed in the *Shema*.

---

<sup>202</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 108.



In response to this, Dunn argues that Paul could have simply been alluding to “the primary conviction that ‘the Lord (God) had said to the Lord (Christ), ‘Sit at my right hand. . .,’ a confession set precisely in contrast to the gods many and lords many of Graeco-Roman worship.”<sup>203</sup> In defense of this, Dunn notes the distinctions between “from whom” and “through whom,” concluding that the addition of the one Lord “is referred to in terms of agency, the *mediating agency* through whom all things and believers have effective being.”<sup>204</sup> This interpretation is closely connected to one of Dunn’s critiques of Bauckham, outlined above, namely that Jesus’s role in Creation would have been partial, God being the source of Creation, and Jesus being the agent through whom God created. However, the value of this argument relies on the assumption that Bauckham’s view of divine identity is not the correct one. As such, it assumes what it is trying to show. On the other hand, if Bauckham’s view is correct, then any participation in Creation would have placed Jesus on the divine side of the dichotomy between God and all reality. In other words, since part of God’s identity is His role as Creator, which is shared with no one,<sup>205</sup> then even if the Son’s role in Creation was “limited” to mediating agency, the mere fact that Paul is now including Jesus in that act of Creation implies that he is, indeed, including Jesus as part of the identity of God. The question would be whether the first-century audience identified God in this way, through His creative act, and it seems clear, from Scripture, that this is the case.<sup>206</sup> Different roles within the divine Persons would not refute this claim.

---

<sup>203</sup> Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, 108.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>205</sup> The only biblical counterexamples to this would be the so-called intermediary figures of Word and Wisdom, which Dunn, himself, recognizes are not distinct from God, but rather extensions of God, as has been explained in previous sections. As such, Jesus’s role in Creation would be unique.

<sup>206</sup> Scripture never attributes Creation to anyone other than God, and oftentimes points to God as Creator when describing Him or identifying Him as the true God. Similarly, many of the church fathers point to God as Creator as evidence that He is the only true God, whereas other gods are merely idols or part of Creation, itself.

Furthermore, Dunn's reliance on the terms "from whom" and "through whom" for his argument harken back to Basil's own defense of the interchangeable use of these terms, in which he argues that these terms can and are used of all three Persons.<sup>207</sup> As such, their use in Paul do not necessarily point to the sharp distinction that Dunn is claiming they do.

Given the above discussion, it seems correct to say that, in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul is, in fact, redefining the Shema, in a sense, "So that the oneness of God also includes the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the agent of creation."<sup>208</sup> The way he does this is by dividing up the titles used in the Shema, "God" and "Lord," and attributing them to the Father and the Son, respectively, reflecting the Pauline Pattern that is reflected throughout his letters. This passage, then, shows how the Pauline Pattern fits with the concept of divine identity. For Paul, the distinction between God and Lord was not meant to imply a distinction between Jesus and Deity.<sup>209</sup> Rather, the Pauline Pattern is a way of speaking about the internal relationships that exist within the one identity of YHWH. The redefining of the Shema emphasizes the Father and Son's unity by placing them within the one divine identity of God, whereas the Pauline Pattern emphasizes their distinction. For Paul, there was only one God, YHWH, and both the Father and the Son were part of the identity of this one God.<sup>210</sup> This is why Tertullian, also speaking polemically against the belief in gods and lords, refers to the Pauline Pattern as a way of speaking about the Father and

---

<sup>207</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 13.

<sup>208</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, USA, 2018), 167.

<sup>209</sup> In other words, it wasn't meant to imply that Jesus was not God, or divine.

<sup>210</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 2468.

son, individually, and together.<sup>211</sup> According to Tertullian, spoken of together, the Father is to be called “God,” and the Son is to be called “Lord.” When speaking of each Person individually, however, the titles of “God” and “Lord” can apply to each of them, including the Holy Spirit.<sup>212</sup> Yet, for Tertullian, as with all of the church fathers, there was only one God, namely YHWH.<sup>213</sup> Irenaeus, similarly, affirms the one God (the Father), “containing in Himself from all eternity His Word and His Wisdom.”<sup>214</sup> This implies that the Son and the Spirit are part of the identity or nature of the one God, very similar to notion of divine identity, described here.

This is all done within the context of what Paul taught about Jesus, as a whole. Paul knew that Creation, redemption, and sovereignty were three essential aspects of the identity of God. Therefore, by affirming that Jesus took part in Creation and redemption, and by calling Him *Lord*, which reflects His sovereignty, Paul was affirming that Jesus was God, the very same God of Israel. To avoid ditheism, Paul developed a pattern, which has been described, here, which allows him to continue affirming a strict monotheism, while not denying Christ’s deity. Without this concept of divine identity, Paul’s claims about Jesus would be incredibly problematic. Jesus would either have to simply be another intermediary figure like Wisdom, or He would have to be another God. The former does not successfully account for Christ’s unique relationship with the Father, and the latter was unacceptable for first-century Jews. Given the framework of divine

---

<sup>211</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, Ch. 13.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Tertullian and others used terms such as “substance,” “essence,” or “Being,” which are intentionally not being used, here, to avoid deviating the discussion into the meaning of these terms. However, it would seem that, when the early church fathers used these terms, they were affirming the very same thing Paul is asserting, namely that the Father and Son are the same Being (YHWH), but distinct from one another. The church fathers spoke of substance and essence, whereas I am speaking of identity. But the general concept is the same. This will become clearer in the next chapter, where I will discuss the nature of God. It will be my contention that, taken together, identity and nature reflect the overall trinitarian teachings of the early church fathers.

<sup>214</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 104.

identity, however, Paul could have made these claims while avoiding these implications. The Pauline Pattern must have been born out of this desire, and as such reflects this notion of divine identity.

### **Conclusion**

There is one God, YHWH, whose identity is reflected in His role in Creation and redemption, and in His sovereign rule over everything. Second-temple Judaism held to this view of divine identity, making worship exclusive to this one God, and this is the theological context in which the New Testament was written. Furthermore, the divine name was usually substituted for the title of Lord, which was also the most common title used for Jesus, in the New Testament. Jesus was also taught to have participated in Creation, redemption, and God's sovereignty. As such, the first-century audience would have understood all of these claims to be pointing to Christ's deity. However, given the strict monotheism present, at the time, this could have been problematic and confusing. One attempt at avoiding this confusion, and avoiding falling into any sort of ditheism, was the Pauline Pattern. The Pauline Pattern reflects this notion of divine identity, allowing both the Father and the Son to be part of the one identity of the one God, YHWH. The Pauline Pattern, and the notion of divine identity, is reflected to varying degrees both throughout Scripture, and in the writings of the early church fathers. One of the major implications of this pattern is that, generally speaking, up until around the fourth century, the title of "God" was virtually synonymous with "the Father."

The divine identity of YHWH, the Pauline Pattern, and the identification of "God" with the Father are all pieces of a much larger puzzle. In response to the main question being asked in this dissertation (Who is the Father?), the previous chapter reached the conclusion that the Father is YHWH. Throughout the first four centuries, there would have been no other answer. Putting

this together with the elements described in this chapter, the answer can be expanded upon. For example, at the beginning of this chapter, the question was asked, “In what sense is the Father, YHWH?” One of the reasons for asking this question is that trinitarian theology maintains that YHWH is triune, and, yet the New Testament and early church fathers also maintain that Jesus is, in some sense, YHWH. How could the Father and the Son be YHWH, if YHWH is triune, and neither the Father and the Son are triune? Furthermore, more clarification is needed in order to understand how both the Father and the Son can be YHWH, and yet the Son is not the Father. The notion of divine identity, together with the Pauline Pattern, can help answer these questions. Simply put, in what sense is the Father, YHWH? The answer is, in the sense that He is part of YHWH’s divine identity. The same would apply to the Son and the Spirit.

Part of YHWH’s identity, then, would be triunity.<sup>215</sup> The Father is included in that identity. However, although this answer is a bit better than simply saying that the Father is YHWH, it is still incomplete. To say that the Father (and the Son and the Spirit) is included in the identity of YHWH can lead to the misunderstanding that the Father is only *part* of that identity, or that the Father is only part of YHWH, rather than YHWH, Himself. This does not reflect orthodox trinitarian theology, however. As stated in the Nicene Creed, for example, and by many church fathers, each Person of the Trinity is fully (or truly) God. The Father is not a *part* of God, rather He is truly God, in Himself. The same is true of the other two Persons. YHWH, then, is not a composition of three Persons. Yet, this can be one of the misunderstandings that arise from affirming that the Father is part of the identity of the one God. This is the reason most early church fathers centered their trinitarian discussions on God’s nature, the argument being that, if someone shared God’s nature, He was, in Himself, that very

---

<sup>215</sup> More will be said about this in the next chapters, showing that this is the case, and how this can be used to respond to one of the more common critiques of the doctrine of the Trinity.

same God. As such, while the answer being proposed, here, is true, it cannot be complete until it includes this notion of God's nature, so central to trinitarian theology. This, then, will be the focus of the next chapter, seeking to build upon the notion of divine identity with the notion of God's nature, and as a result form a more complete answer to the question of the identity of the Father.

## CHAPTER 4: GOD’S NATURE AND THE IDENTITY OF THE FATHER

### Introduction

Thus far, I have argued two main points. First, the consensus throughout the first four centuries was that the Father is YHWH, and Jesus is YHWH’s Son. However, there was also a sense in which Jesus was identified with YHWH. As such, to avoid confusion, Paul developed a pattern in which he spoke about the Father and the Son using the titles “God” and “Lord,” respectively. This Pauline Pattern was meant to continue affirming the deity of Christ, while maintaining a distinction between the Father and the Son. Secondly, I have argued that at least one of the ways in which second-temple Judaism viewed God was through the lens of divine identity, as defined by Richard Bauckham.<sup>216</sup> The two primary categories in which Israel identified YHWH was through His relation to Israel and His relation to all reality. As such, there are three main roles or actions that, for second-temple Jews, belonged solely to God, namely God as Creator, Sovereign Ruler, and Redeemer. The first two reflect God’s relation to all reality, whereas the third reflects God’s relation to Israel.<sup>217</sup> The Pauline Pattern was born out of this concept of divine identity and reflects it by including the Father and the Son within the one identity of YHWH (1 Cor. 8:6). After all of this, the initial answer to the question, “Who is the Father?” that is being proposed, here, is, simply, the Father is YHWH. In what sense is the Father YHWH? In the sense that He is part of the divine identity.

As expressed at the end of the previous chapter, this answer, while correct, is nevertheless incomplete. The main reason that it is incomplete is because it does not fully reflect

---

<sup>216</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Kindle Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), loc. 3525.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 154.

the emphasis of the trinitarian discussions of the early church fathers, which were usually centered around God's nature, more so than His identity. For example, Tertullian writes, "For the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole."<sup>218</sup> Similarly, St. Basil of Caesarea, arguing against those that refute Christ's divinity, states, "As far as I can tell, the first one who dared to declare openly and teach that the only-begotten Son was unlike the God and Father in substance was Aetius the Syrian."<sup>219</sup> In fact, much of the Arian debate and controversies surrounding the wording of the Nicene Creed revolved around this concept of substance or *hypostasis*, which was taken to mean the very essence or nature of God.<sup>220</sup> As such, whatever answer that is proposed, here, must take into account, not only the concept of divine identity, but this idea of God's nature, as well. Whatever is meant by the claim, "The Father is YHWH," it must incorporate these two concepts.

The following chapter will center on the nature of God, first asking whether God does, in fact, have a nature, at all. From here, a description of the major attributes of God will be offered, followed by a discussion on how this nature relates to God's identity. Once this is established, it will become apparent that the real issue behind the claim "The Father is YHWH" is the meaning of the verb "is." As will be shown, there are two main ways in which this verb can be understood, namely the "is" of identity and the "is" of predication. The problem with many trinitarian statements, as explained in the first chapter, is the fact that, when someone says things like "the Father is God," or "The Son is God," they mistakenly take them to be statements of

---

<sup>218</sup> Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," *Early Church Theology* (Fig, 2012), 216.

<sup>219</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 82.

<sup>220</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 242.



identity.<sup>221</sup> I will argue, here, that the “is” in these statements belongs to the category of predication, rather than identity. As such, the main thesis that will be defended in this chapter is that the “is” in the statement, “The Father is YHWH” is an “is” of predication. What this statement essentially means, then, is that the Father has all of the essential attributes of God. The same can be said about the Son and the Spirit. However, if there are three Persons who have the attributes of God, the question becomes, “Are there three Gods?” This question will be answered negatively using the concept of divine identity established in the previous chapter. As such, both divine identity and God’s nature come together to form a more coherent formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically as it relates to the identity of the Father. Once all of this has been established, and a few secondary issues have been resolved, the chapter will conclude with the final, proposed, answer to the question, “Who is the Father?” This will, then, lead to a discussion of possible objections and areas for future study that will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

## **God’s Nature**

### God’s Nature, Defined

This is, perhaps, the most potentially complicated section throughout this dissertation, thus far. The reason for this is that, when discussing God’s nature, it is easy to fall into a rabbit hole of definitions and semantics. What is a nature? What is a property? What is an attribute? Are they the same as terms such as “substance,” or “essence,” or “being?” How are these concepts related to one another? Can any of these terms properly be applied to God, or is our language simply far too limited to comprehend God on a basic level, or at all? These are the sorts

---

<sup>221</sup> Thomas D. Senior, “The Incarnation and the Trinity,” *Reason for the Hope Within* (William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 255.

of questions that arise in discussions such as this one, not to mention the application of these questions, and their answers, to Scripture and the teachings of the church. As such, in order to fully delve into the answers to these questions, more time and space is needed than that which is available, here. However, this does not mean that the discussion cannot proceed. We must simply begin with a working definition of “nature” that will help the reader understand what is being talked about, fully recognizing, and accepting, the limitations of language.

This is, of course, a limitation, and not an impossibility. As stated by Kevin Vanhoozer, after a lengthy discussion on the difficulties of finding and expressing meaning through language, “The despair of language’s frailties must not engulf the delight in language’s capacities...The hermeneutics of conviction thus stands for the belief that the same interpretive virtues that arise from the motivation for literary knowledge are also reliable means for attaining cognitive contact with meaning.”<sup>222</sup> In other words, although language is, indeed, limited, especially as it pertains to speaking about God, this does not preclude speaking about God. Similarly, the fact that God is beyond full comprehension does not preclude *any* sort of comprehension. The mere fact that God has revealed Himself shows that humans have at least some capacity for understanding this revelation.<sup>223</sup> As such, while a definition will be offered for “nature,” the discussion will proceed under the assumption that the meaning of these terms is generally understood, while at the same time recognizing that more can, and has, been said about these concepts to offer further clarification.

In his discussion on the nature of God, Millard Erickson speaks of God’s attributes as that which constitutes God’s nature, stating, “It is better to conceive of God’s attributes as his nature,

---

<sup>222</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 465-466.

<sup>223</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 141.

not a collection of separate parts or an addition to his essence. Thus, God *is* his love, holiness, and power.”<sup>224</sup> Erickson’s definition is not entirely clear, even making a distinction between God’s attributes and His properties, while recognizing that, in general, these two terms are synonymous.<sup>225</sup> However, he does make clear that, whatever he means by *nature*, it contains attributes that are essential to God, “permanent and intrinsic qualities, which cannot be gained or lost.”<sup>226</sup> Elmer Towns makes a similar affirmation, stating, “God’s nature is what He is, and if we could take away God’s nature, it would eliminate His existence.”<sup>227</sup> He further defines God’s attributes as extensions or expressions of His nature, reflected through “attitudes, actions and points of relationship with His creation/creatures.”<sup>228</sup> Once again, this distinction can create certain confusion, implying that, while God’s nature is essential, His attributes are not. Nevertheless, Towns essentially defines God’s nature as that which is essential to Him. Alvin Plantinga offers a similar definition, stating that God’s nature is “a property he has essentially that includes each property essential to him.”<sup>229</sup> Plantinga further clarifies, in a footnote, that “an object has a nature if it has any essential properties at all.”<sup>230</sup>

As can be seen, while there is some discrepancy as to the details, especially as they relate to properties and attributes, and their relationship to God’s nature, the underlying principle in

---

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today*, (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 98.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 7.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

defining God's nature is that which is essential to God.<sup>231</sup> In other words, whatever makes God, God, is what is meant by God's nature. Authors, philosophers, and theologians may differ on what attributes are essential, and which are not. However, this seems to be more of an epistemological difference, rather than ontological. In other words, while we may never be able to fully know God's nature or be able to offer a complete list of His essential attributes with which everyone agrees, the reality remains that there is such a hypothetical list, composed of whatever attributes are essential to God. Not everyone agrees with this last point, however, and that is where our discussion truly begins.

### Does God Have a Nature?

Alvin Plantinga's 1980 lecture on this very question explores four different answers to this question, ultimately concluding that God does, in fact, have a nature, although he leaves much of the initial questions from his introduction unanswered.<sup>232</sup> The problem, according to Plantinga, arises from the nature of God's attributes, themselves, and how this nature affects God's sovereignty. Plantinga seems to assume Anselm's description of God as the greatest conceivable Being, and states that His greatness includes His aseity, "his uncreatedness, self-sufficiency and independence of everything else – and his *sovereignty* – his control over all things and the dependence of all else on his creative and sustaining activity."<sup>233</sup> However, whatever properties God has could not have been created by God, Himself, for that would mean

---

<sup>231</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be using "properties" and "attributes" as synonymous, although certain authors make a distinction. I will also be including God's attributes as part of His nature. In other words, for me, God's nature is composed of whatever essential attributes He has, without which, He would not be God.

<sup>232</sup> Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 145-146.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

that they are not essential to God. For example, if God created the property of omnipotence, then that would mean that God was not omnipotent until He created it. Hence, God is not essentially omnipotent. Furthermore, God is not free to change the meaning of a property such as omnipotence, which implies that these properties are not dependent upon God in any meaningful way. The same could be said of any property that God has. As such, if God has a nature, composed of particular properties, then God is, in some sense, dependent, limited, and conditioned by these properties. These properties must exist independently of God, and God seems to be, in some sense, dependent upon them being what they are, for Him to be what He is.

In response to these apparent problems, Plantinga evaluates three possible responses, before concluding with his own position. The first possible response to the problem of God's nature is to affirm that God has a nature, but to say that He is identical with it, "so that he is not limited and conditioned by something distinct from him."<sup>234</sup> The second response is to deny that God has a nature by denying that there are any natures to be had at all. Lastly, some could respond to the problem by saying that God has no nature, "not because there are no properties but because he has no properties essentially."<sup>235</sup> After surveying and rejecting each of these positions, Plantinga concludes that God does have a nature, is not identical with it, but, nevertheless, is not dependent, limited, nor conditioned by it. However, in all honesty, it is not entirely clear how he reaches this conclusion based on his previous discussion of the problems with this position, and I do not believe he ever fully resolves these issues. He seems to merely conclude that this is the best position to take, from the available possible responses, with the least number of problems, in comparison to those responses.

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 10.

The first possible response is a summary statement of the doctrine of divine simplicity, as put forth by Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and others. It is interesting to read Aquinas affirm that one of the reasons for why God must be simple is that “Every composite is posterior to its component parts and is dependent on them; but God is the first being, as shown above.”<sup>236</sup> He goes on to argue, similarly, that “Every composite has a cause, for things in themselves different cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused, as shown above, since He is the first efficient cause.”<sup>237</sup> These two reasons are nearly identical to the problems with God’s nature, highlighted by Plantinga, above. Hence, it is true that the doctrine of divine simplicity is, in a sense, a response to these potential problems. Although this doctrine holds much weight in church tradition, being held and affirmed by many of the church fathers, for example, it presents many problems that should, at the very least, make the Christian somewhat apprehensive about it. For example, Craig points out the strangeness of the doctrine, and its counter-intuitiveness.<sup>238</sup> He notes that divine simplicity implies that there is no distinction, not only between God and His attributes or nature, but between attributes, themselves. If God is simple, in Aquinas’s sense, then there is no real difference between omnipotence and goodness, for example, or justice and mercy.<sup>239</sup> Yet, it seems obvious that there *is* a difference between these properties, and that these differences go beyond simply our own experience of them.

---

<sup>236</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1947), 42.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> J. P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 524.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

Another issue with divine simplicity is that, if God were simple, then there would be no difference in saying things like, “God is just and merciful,” and saying, “God is God and God,” other than one being more helpful for our own understanding than the other. As stated by Craig, “To say that God’s essence just is his existence seems wholly obscure, since then there is in God’s case no entity that exists; there is just the existing itself without any subject. Things exist; but it is unintelligible to say that *exists* just exists.”<sup>240</sup> Perhaps the most significant problem with this doctrine, however, is the fact that it finds little, if any, biblical support. It seems that this doctrine was born out of a need to respond to certain objections to God, or to accommodate certain beliefs about God, rather than a result of biblical study.<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, it is based on certain philosophical assumptions such as the neo-Platonic vision of ultimate reality, the truth of which is not entirely obvious. As such, this does not seem like an adequate response to the problem of God’s nature.

The second possible response to the problem of God’s nature is that of nominalism, the view that universals, or abstract objects like propositions, numbers, etc., “have no reality independent of their existence in the thought of an individual.”<sup>242</sup> However, this need not be the only response to the problems posed by realism on God’s aseity. Rather, as Augustine noted, these platonic universals could simply belong to the divine mind, itself, rather than part of the created order.<sup>243</sup> The result of this allows for the objective existence of these platonic universals,

---

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 525.

<sup>241</sup> Plantinga, *Goes God Have a Nature?*, 28.

<sup>242</sup> D. A. Rausch, “Nominalism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 843.

<sup>243</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 506.

while continuing to affirm that God is explanatorily prior to their existence, and as such does not depend on them for His own existence. However, as Craig and Moreland point out, this has its own issues, and the conversation between realists and nominalists is ongoing.<sup>244</sup> In either case, as Plantinga points out, even if nominalism were true, this would not solve the problem of God's aseity, for although there might not be a property of *omniscience*, it is still true that God is omniscient, and God is not free to change that truth.<sup>245</sup> Simply put, there are certain truths, such as "God is omniscient," or "if something is *pi* inches long, then it is longer than three inches," that are not within God's control. As such, if there are still certain truths that are outside of God's control, nominalism does not solve the issue, but, at best, simply pushes the problem a step further.

It is here that Plantinga moves his argument forward, showing that the real issue with God having a nature is not the existence of properties or abstract objects, but truth, itself.<sup>246</sup> Simply put, God's aseity, or what Plantinga calls the "sovereignty-aseity intuition," requires that there be no truths outside of God's control, and this is only possible "if and only if every proposition is such that it is within God's power to cause it to be true and within his power to cause it to be false."<sup>247</sup> If this is the case, then what is needed to maintain the sovereignty-aseity intuition is universal possibilism, the view that there are no necessary truths. One of the major problems with this view is that it is, itself, affirming a necessary truth, namely that "there are no necessary truths." Furthermore, if there are no necessary truths, then God can have a nature, even

---

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>245</sup> Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 86.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 94.



necessary attributes, for it is not necessarily true that “God cannot have necessary attributes.” This position leads to all kinds of absurdities, such as that God could have made  $2+2=10$ , or that God could have existed necessarily, and not existed at the same time. It seems to be a rather extreme response to the problem of God’s nature that sacrifices too much to gain so very little. As such, this is not an adequate response to the problem of God’s nature, either.

Unfortunately, Plantinga’s response does not seem to fair much better, for he simply seems to affirm that God has a nature, while at the same time accepting the limitations and problems that come with this assertion. For example, he states, “We should therefore assert forthrightly that God has a nature and that not everything is possible – even for him.”<sup>248</sup> However, in his introduction, Plantinga notes that one of the problems with affirming that God has a nature is that this implies there are certain things that are beyond His control. As highlighted above, the fact that there are certain things (God’s attributes, for example) that exist, independently of God in the sense that He didn’t create them, nor is He free to change or redefine them, poses a serious problem for God’s sovereignty. This is one of the problems Plantinga sought to resolve, and yet he ultimately seems to simply accept that it is so, if for no other reason that there are no better alternatives. It seems to me that a better solution would be to re-analyze the problem, itself, and ask whether it is an actual problem, in the first place.

One of the questions that Plantinga asks in his introduction, which serves as a summary of the central issue behind God having a nature, is, “How could a thing whose non-existence is impossible – the number 8, let’s say, or the property of being a horse – depend upon anything for its existence?”<sup>249</sup> This question closely parallels another apparent paradox involving God’s

---

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 5.

nature, namely the Euthyphro Dilemma. One version of this dilemma asks, “Are morally good actions morally good simply in virtue of God’s favoring them? Or does God favor them because they are – independently of his favoring them – morally good?”<sup>250</sup> Interestingly enough, this question is already a reformulation of the original Euthyphro Dilemma, which was about the love of the gods toward the pious.<sup>251</sup> As such, it has been reformulated to apply to various aspects of morality, especially religious ethics. The Euthyphro Dilemma essentially asks, what makes something good/correct? Is it good/correct because God says its correct? Or does God say its good/correct because it is, in itself, correct? Both answers present their own set of problems.

The same question that is being asked about morality seems to be being asked of God’s attributes. Does God create and define omnipotence? Or does omnipotence exist, in itself, and God simply has that attribute, thereby becoming omnipotent? Both present their own set of problems. If God created omnipotence, then that would mean that God, at some point, was not omnipotent. However, if God did not create omnipotence, then that would mean that God somehow depends upon something else, namely the attribute of omnipotence, to be God (assuming omnipotence is an essential attribute of God). The similarity between the Euthyphro Dilemma and the problem of God’s nature means that a similar answer may be offered, for both. In the case of the Euthyphro Dilemma, the best response has traditionally been to reject both options (the two so-called “horns” of the dilemma), and ground morality in God Himself. As stated by C. S. Lewis,

God neither *obeys* nor *creates* the moral law. The good is uncreated; it never could have been otherwise; it has in it no shadow of contingency; it lies, as Plato said, on the other side of existence...But we, favoured beyond the wisest pagans, know what lies beyond existence, what admits no contingency, what lends divinity to all else,

---

<sup>250</sup> David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

what is the ground of all existence, is not simply a law but also a begetting love, a love begotten, and the love which, being between these two, is also imminent in all those who are caught up to share the unity of their self-caused life. God is not merely good, but goodness; goodness is not merely divine, but God.<sup>252</sup>

While not speaking about the Euthyphro Dilemma, per se, Lewis's statements reflect this common response to the dilemma, although he does so through a trinitarian lens. Nevertheless, the underlying principle is the same, namely that God is the Good, Himself, from whom all other goods derive their goodness.

God is the standard for goodness, and nothing is good outside of His own nature. As such, something is neither good in itself, nor good because God says its good. Rather, it is good because *God* is good. As stated by Craig, "God's character is definitive of moral goodness; it serves as the paradigm of moral goodness. Thus, the morally good/bad is determined by reference to God's nature; the morally right/wrong is determined by reference to his will."<sup>253</sup> Similarly, it seems that the problem concerning God's nature relies on a false dilemma, namely that either God creates His attributes, or they exist independently of Him. I believe that the best response to this would be along the lines of the response to the Euthyphro Dilemma, namely that abstract universals, specifically God's attributes, are somehow grounded in God, Himself, but this does not mean that their existence is arbitrary. In the same way in which morality is grounded in God, and yet moral commands and duties are not arbitrary (in other words, it couldn't be the case that rape would be good if God commanded rape) because they are expressions of His very nature, God's attributes are not arbitrary (omnipotence could not be other than what it is), for they are grounded in the very nature. If this is so, it is incorrect to pose

---

<sup>252</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 67.

<sup>253</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 182.

the question, “Is God free to create or destroy an abstract concept such as *omnipotence*?” for this statement is simply incoherent. The question is essentially asking whether God can stop being God, which is impossible because God is a necessary Being.

God is free, and completely sovereign, but this freedom and sovereignty doesn’t imply the ability to stop being God. As such, being able to create or destroy abstract objects, ideas, or propositions such as *omnipotence* is not a pre-requisite for God to be absolutely sovereign, in the same way as it is not a pre-requisite for God to be able to create a square circle in order to be absolutely omnipotent. The former is simply a misunderstanding of sovereignty, in much the same way as the latter is a misunderstanding of omnipotence. Furthermore, if Plantinga’s original question truly presents a problem with God’s nature, then it would seem that it also presents a serious problem for the Trinity, itself. The question is, “How could a thing whose non-existence is impossible...depend upon anything for its existence?”<sup>254</sup> However, this is precisely what has traditionally been affirmed of the Son and the Spirit, in regard to the Father, namely that the Son depends, in some sense, on the Father for His own existence. This does not, however, imply that the Son had a beginning, or was created, or is in any sense less than the Father. Origen, for example, states, “God is the Father of His only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of Him, and derives from Him what He is, but without any beginning.”<sup>255</sup> Similarly, Tertullian states, “For the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of

---

<sup>254</sup> Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 5.

<sup>255</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* (Fig, 2012), 255.

the whole.”<sup>256</sup> Irenaeus held a similar view, affirming that the Father is the Godhead, whereas the Son and the Spirit were a part of this Godhead.<sup>257</sup>

To be fair, these statements were, in fact, grounds for debate, especially during the Arian controversy, precisely because some viewed the Son’s begottenness and dependence upon the Father as evidence that He is not God. Nevertheless, orthodox trinitarian theology affirms both that the Son is begotten of the Father, and yet fully God and eternal. How this works, exactly, is beyond the scope of this paper. The point is, however, that Plantinga’s dilemma about necessarily existing “things” depending upon something else for their existence is not actually a problem. Something can, in fact, depend upon something else for its existence, and yet still be eternal, or necessarily existing. The same could be said about God, then, if we were to grant that God depends, in some sense, on His attributes to be God. However, as noted above, this need not be the case, for the best option is simply to ground these attributes in God, Himself. Once again, more needs to be said and analyzed about this last claim, but it seems at least likely true, and there are no immediate logical inconsistencies in making such a claim. As such, given the intuitiveness of the claim, the biblical evidence, and the soundness of grounding these attributes in God, it can safely be concluded that God does, in fact, have a nature.

### **What is God’s Nature?**

As stated, above, God’s nature can be defined as those attributes that are essential to Him. However, any attempt to form a definitive list of essential attributes will be futile, given that our knowledge of Him is necessarily limited, and how far beyond human understanding is His greatness (Psalm 145:3). Nevertheless, this does not mean that nothing can be known about God,

---

<sup>256</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, Ch. 9.

<sup>257</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 104.

for Scripture itself states that, whatever can be known about Him, can be known precisely because He has revealed it (Rm. 1:19). Perhaps in an attempt to preserve the mystery of God, and to remind people of the limits of their finite minds, Aquinas and others affirmed that man cannot know what God *is*, but rather he can only know what He is *not*.<sup>258</sup> Yet, Scripture consistently affirms, not what God is *not*, but rather what He *is*. In fact, in his very first article on God's simplicity, Aquinas's first response to the claim that God is a body is not to simply say that God is *not* a body, but to point to Scripture's teaching that God is a spirit.<sup>259</sup> Aquinas, then, continues to affirm that God is "the First Mover," or "the First Being," "the most noble of beings," ultimately concluding that God is, in fact, "absolutely simple."<sup>260</sup> As such, it seems clear that, while knowledge of God is limited, there are things that can, and should, be said about Him, and even those that claim that this is not possible, ultimately tend to make many claims about who and what God is, as in Aquinas's case. Rather than merely attempting to "define" God through a list of attributes, however, what will be attempted, here, is to identify those essential attributes that have historically been used to describe God, both in Scripture and in the early church fathers. It is through this lens that trinitarian doctrine developed, and as such this should be the starting point for any Christian definition or description of God.

### Eternity

The very first verse in the Bible states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). This reading lends itself to the teaching that God created *ex nihilo*, or out of

---

<sup>258</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 30.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

nothing, pointing to God's power and transcendence.<sup>261</sup> However, rabbi Rashi argued that the correct reading of this passage was, "When God began to create the heaven and the earth," pointing to a midrashic teaching that affirms that the author was not concerned with the order of creation.<sup>262</sup> The latter interpretation does not imply that there was no definitive creation, however, but merely points to the fact that the author's concerns were elsewhere. Much has been written on the nature of God's creative act, as this seems to be the focus of the entire first chapter. However, as noted by Vos, in actuality, "God is the subject of the first sentence of the book, and He dominates the entire chapter."<sup>263</sup> As such, attention should be given to what the Creation narrative says about God. Regarding this, Vos continues, "Called by His name *Elohim* thirty-five times in the creation narrative, He demonstrates infinite power and transcends all material existence, as indeed the majestic name *Elohim* signifies."<sup>264</sup> Andrew Steinmann agrees, saying, "God's existence outside of time and space [is] simply assumed by the author: he created, but he himself has no origin... *In the beginning* is a statement that locates the creation of space, matter, and time when God, including the person of the Son of God, already was."<sup>265</sup> Simply put, one of the assumptions that is found in the Creation narrative is the eternal existence of God, as contrasted with the beginning of the Universe. The first essential attribute of God, then, is eternity.

---

<sup>261</sup> Howard F. Vos, *Genesis: Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1982), 13.

<sup>262</sup> La Torá con Rashi: Génesis (Mexico: Editorial Jerusalem de México, 2001), 4.

<sup>263</sup> Vos, *Genesis*, 13.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 50.

It is worth noting that God's revealed name, YHWH, also points to this aspect of His nature. While the etymology of the tetragrammaton is unclear, and there is no consensus as to the exact meaning of the divine name, it is clear that one of its implications has to do with God's very existence or being.<sup>266</sup> As noted by van Bekkum, quoting Rabbi Isaac's interpretation of the divine name, "God said to Moses: Tell them that I am now what I always was and always will be."<sup>267</sup> Matthew Henry's commentary concurs, stating that the divine name has three major implications, one of which is that, "I am eternal and immutable" (my translation).<sup>268</sup> This was also the view of many of the church fathers, such as Gregory of Nazianzus who states, "God always was and is and will be – or better, God always *is*. For 'was' and 'will be' are divisions of the time we experience, of a nature that flows away; but he is always and gives himself this name when he identifies himself to Moses on the Mountain."<sup>269</sup>

That eternity has traditionally been considered as one of the essential divine attributes can be further seen in the polemical writings of the church fathers, in which God is contrasted with false gods. For example, Tertullian contrasts God with false gods, pointing to the true God's role as Creator, "from whom all things come," noting the nature of God as good, sovereign, omniscient, omnipresent, and eternal.<sup>270</sup> Simply put, for Tertullian, Deity *requires* eternity,

---

<sup>266</sup> T. E. McComiskey, "God, Names Of," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 507.

<sup>267</sup> Wout Jac. Van Bekkum, "What's in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition," *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity* (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV: 2006), 7.

<sup>268</sup> Comentario Bíblico de Matthew Henry (España: Editorial CLIE, 1999), 79.

<sup>269</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 38: On the Theophany," *The Early Church Fathers: Gregory of Nazianzus* (London: Routledge, 2006), 120.

<sup>270</sup> Tertullian, *The Soul's Testimony*, translated by Rev. S. Thelwall, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian09.html>, ch. II.



which is why he emphasizes God as Creator so often in his writings, for his belief was that, if God created the Universe, then He was not part of the Universe, and therefore eternal.<sup>271</sup> This was typically contrasted with the false gods who were believed to be a part of the Universe, itself, and therefore could not be eternal.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, Basil of Caesarea, arguing against Eunomius, also points to God's eternity as evidence that He is, in fact, God.<sup>273</sup> A similar practice can be seen even prior to the church fathers, in the second-temple literature in which God's eternity (or the lack of eternity in other gods) is also seen as evidence that other gods are mere idols.<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, as noted by Kelly, eternity was precisely one of the central issues in medieval trinitarian debates, with defenders of the Trinity pointing to Christ's co-eternity with the Father as evidence that that He, too, is God.<sup>275</sup> Kelly shows how, during the Nicene Crisis, eternity was seen as evidence of divinity, and was the central issue in the Arian debate.<sup>276</sup> As such, eternity must be one of the essential attributes of God, as evidenced by Scripture, second-temple Jewish literature, and the early church fathers.

### The Anselmian God

Due to its significance in Scripture, its connection with God's identity as Creator, its prevalence in second-temple literature, and its centrality in trinitarian discussions during the first

---

<sup>271</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. II (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1952), 276.

<sup>272</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, translated by Dr. Holmes, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian06.html>, book II.III.

<sup>273</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 91-92.

<sup>274</sup> Wisdom of Solomon 14:13.

<sup>275</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 143, 145.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 224, 236.

four centuries, God's eternity has been discussed, here, more thoroughly than other attributes will be. The above process could also be done with any number of divine attributes, but ultimately a choice would have to be made as to where to draw the line between essential and non-essential attributes. As such, some sort of criterion needs to be offered that helps determine the essential divine attributes before continuing with this discussion. Saint Anselm of Canterbury offers such a criterion in his ontological argument for God. There are various versions of this argument, even within the writings of Anselm themselves, but the central claim that will be useful, here, is that God is "something than which nothing greater can be thought."<sup>277</sup> Anselm goes on to say, "And so you are just, truthful, happy, and whatever it is better to be than not to be."<sup>278</sup> Anselm uses this definition of "God" in order to argue for God's necessary existence, claiming that to exist in reality is greater than to exist only in our minds.<sup>279</sup> As such, in order for God to be God, He must exist.

The soundness or truth of Anselm's ontological argument need not come into question here, for the key aspect about his argument is his concept of God. A popular way to restate Anselm's description is that God is, "the greatest conceivable being," which means that His properties have "intrinsic maxima, that is, they have peak values."<sup>280</sup> As explained by Plantinga,

---

<sup>277</sup> Anselm, *Monologion and Proslogion with the replies of Guanilo and Anselm* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 99.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>280</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 497.

this intrinsic maximum would include such properties as knowledge, power, and moral perfection.<sup>281</sup> Plantinga notes,

If for every proposition *p*, a being *B* knows whether or not *p* is true, then *B* has a degree of knowledge that is utterly unsurpassable. So a greatest possible being would have to have this kind of knowledge: it would have to be *omniscient*. Similarly for *power*; omnipotence is a degree of power that can't possibly be excelled. Moral perfection or moral excellence is perhaps not quite so clear; still a being could perhaps always do what is morally right, so that it would not be possible for it to be exceeded along those lines.<sup>282</sup>

Plantinga goes on to note that certain properties may not be so clear, such as that of *love*, but recognizes that possibility that these properties could have intrinsic maximum. Using this idea of intrinsic maximum, then, Plantinga has added three attributes to the list of essential attributes for God, namely omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection. Note, however, that he does not pretend to create an exhaustive list of God's essential attributes but leaves the door open to other attributes. This is a practice that is found throughout the writings of many theologians and philosophers, demonstrating that such an exhaustive list may not even be possible. Thomas Senor, for example, notes that God's eternity, omnipotence, atemporality, aspatiality, necessity, "and so forth," are all essential attributes for divinity.<sup>283</sup> Similarly, Hasker notes that the Persons of the Trinity possess "the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, and so on."<sup>284</sup> Kelly also points to God as Creator, omniscience, and sovereignty as the defining

---

<sup>281</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 91.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> Senor, "The Incarnation and the Trinity," 242.

<sup>284</sup> William Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 249.

attributes of God,<sup>285</sup> as do many of the church fathers or those involved in trinitarian debates during the first four centuries such as Arius,<sup>286</sup> the Athanasian Creed,<sup>287</sup> and Tertullian.<sup>288</sup>

There is no definitive list of essential attributes to be found in any of these authors. However, they all share some attributes in common, and all use language that leaves the door open for other attributes to be added to the list. In the examples listed, above, while there are some notable differences such as Senor's inclusion of atemporality and aspatiality in his list, all seem to coincide on the attributes of eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection. These are the attributes that Tertullian uses, in fact, to argue against other gods being God, adding to this list God's sovereignty and His omnipresence.<sup>289</sup> The essentialness of these attributes may be seen in the fact that they are not exclusive to Christian conceptions of God. For example, Kenneth Seeskin argues that the "God of the philosophers" is defined as the greatest conceivable being, although there is no consensus as to what that entails.<sup>290</sup> Seeskin goes on to argue throughout his article that there is a certain harmony between the philosophical conception of God, and the God of Judaism, as revealed in the Torah. Similarly, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines God as "The Being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness...The Supreme Being,"<sup>291</sup> and the Britannica Dictionary defines God as "The perfect and all-powerful

---

<sup>285</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 83.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>287</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 250.

<sup>288</sup> Tertullian, *The Soul's Testimony*, II.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> Kenneth Seeskin, "The God of the Philosophers," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* (2006), 206.

<sup>291</sup> "God," *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/god>, Last Accessed March 14, 2022.

spirit...who created and rules the universe.”<sup>292</sup> It is interesting to note that Britannica also goes on to define “god” in a lesser sense, or in reference to divinity, in general, as “a spirit or being that has great power, strength, knowledge, etc.”<sup>293</sup>

This general conception of God may be seen even in the writings of Aristotle, one of the earliest and most influential philosophers. While space does not permit a full analysis of his arguments for God, Blyth notes that, among other things, Aristotle argues that God is the first cause, or the prime mover, implying His eternity, and claims that, as the first substance from which all other substances derive their existence, God is “the best and finest thing there is...identical with the primary kind of good.”<sup>294</sup> He also notes that, for Aristotle, God is simple, beautiful, and necessary. All of this is to say that, while there is no clear consensus as to all the attributes that are essential to God, there are certain attributes that may be found in nearly all attempts to define God, whether by Christians, Jews, Muslims, philosophers, or even atheists. From this brief survey, the attributes that are most ascribed to God, or to divinity, in general, are those of eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection. This list harmonizes with Scripture’s own description of God as eternal (Is. 40:28), omnipotent (Job 42:2), omniscient (Ps. 147:5), and morally perfect (1 Jn. 4:8).

To be sure, Scripture offers other attributes for God, as do many theologians, church fathers, and philosophers. However, this brief survey shows that, whatever else God is, essentially, He is *at least* eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. This survey also

---

<sup>292</sup> “God,” *The Britannica Dictionary*, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/god>, Last Accessed March 14, 2022.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Dougal Blyth, “Aristotle’s God in Metaphysics 12.7,” *Classical Philology*, vol. 112, no. 2 (2017), 138.

shows that these are the most common attributes that have historically been used in defense of the Trinity, and as evidence against the deity of other beings. As Tertullian argues, speaking against the deity of other beings, the lack of these divine attributes shows that, “Though thou sometimes callest these others gods, though plainly usest the designation as one which does not really belong to them, but is, so to speak, a borrowed one.”<sup>295</sup> In other words, for Tertullian, as with many early church fathers, the title or name of “God” belongs only to YHWH, for only He holds these specific attributes. With this notion of God’s nature in mind, the claim that the Father is YHWH can be developed further. As will now be shown, however, there are two senses in which the “is” in the statement, “The Father is YHWH” may be understood, and a failure to distinguish between these two has given rise to much confusion within trinitarian doctrine, as detailed in the first chapter. As such, the discussion will now move on to its main thesis, namely that the “is” in “the Father is YHWH” should be understood as the “is of predication,” rather than the “is of identity.”

### **The Father “is” YHWH**

Thus far, the main answer to the question about the identity of the Father has simply been that the Father is YHWH. This was the clearest answer offered in Scripture and in the writings of the early church fathers, who understood Christ to be the Son of YHWH. However, the Son was also identified, in some sense, with YHWH, both in Scripture and in the writings of the early church fathers, primarily through the divine name. For example, Matthew (and the Synoptics) claims that Isaiah 40:3 was fulfilled by John the Baptist, which says that the prophet would “Prepare the way for the Lord” (Mt. 3:3). This “Lord,” in Isaiah, is none other than YHWH, and

---

<sup>295</sup> Tertullian, *The Soul’s Testimony*, II.

yet the following verses make it clear that it is Jesus for whom John was preparing the way.<sup>296</sup> As such, the Gospels are claiming that Jesus is the very same Lord (YHWH) mentioned by the prophet. This practice is much more common in Paul's letters, in which many Old Testament passages about YHWH are attributed to Jesus (Rom. 10:13, 1 Cor. 1:31, for example), and the title of "Lord" is almost exclusively used for Jesus, as explained in the previous chapter.<sup>297</sup>

This identification between Jesus and YHWH is precisely what gave rise to the trinitarian debates that occurred during the first four centuries, and the conclusion, as expressed in the Nicene Creed and later creeds, was that God (YHWH) is triune, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all Persons within that Trinity.<sup>298</sup> This trinitarian language, especially the identification of YHWH as triune, has become so ingrained in the Christian church that it is easy to make the mistake of reading this trinitarian language back into Scripture and the writings of the early church fathers. For example, the term "Godhead" was originally generally used in reference to the Father,<sup>299</sup> but later began to take on the meaning of the divine attributes,<sup>300</sup> and even later, still, was commonly used to refer to the Trinity.<sup>301</sup> The same development may be shown to have occurred with the title of "God," originally referring to YHWH, who was not known to be triune until after Jesus, then used to refer to the Father, especially in relation to the Son, but is now used

---

<sup>296</sup> Context suffices to establish this, but John 1:15 makes it explicit.

<sup>297</sup> For a list of the many YHWH texts attributed to Jesus, see Bauckham's *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 2359.

<sup>298</sup> Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*, Vol. I (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970), 267.

<sup>299</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 127.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

by most Christians to refer to the triune God, Himself.<sup>302</sup> In this sense, today the divine name, itself, is usually taken to refer to the triune God, with some theologians arguing that this is how the name was always used in the church.<sup>303</sup>

This brief survey of the development of trinitarian language is meant to show how the claim, “The Father is YHWH” can become confused within modern trinitarian language. Simply put, if YHWH is triune, and the Father is YHWH, it does not seem immediately clear how to avoid the mistaken conclusion that the Father is YHWH. The following section will show that there are two ways in which the statement, “The Father is YHWH” may be understood, one of which leads to the above confusion, the other offering some clarity to the claim. This will lead to some secondary issues such as the proper categorization of triunity (whether it is an essential attribute or not), and whether the divine name can be used in more ways, than one. At the end of this discussion, everything will be put together to answer the question, “Who is the Father?” in a way that avoids the problems that were established in the first chapter. With this goal in mind, the discussion will now move on to the distinction between the “is” of identity and predication.

### The “is” of Identity and Predication

In this discussion, it is important to note that the modern, philosophical notion of identity was likely unknown to the biblical authors, and the early church fathers. Hasker, for example, shows that this was the case, at least in Saint Augustine.<sup>304</sup> As such, the claim that will be made, here, is not that this (the conclusion to this section) is the way in which the biblical authors and

---

<sup>302</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 276

<sup>303</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, “YHWH the Triune God,” *Modern Theology*, 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1999), ISSN 0266-7177, 26.

<sup>304</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 60.



early church fathers conceived of the Trinity. Rather, the claim is that these conclusions may help clarify what these authors and theologians did teach about the Trinity. In a sense, this discussion is a continuation of the work that they did, and as such while not explicitly taught by them, whatever conclusions are made, here, will be shown to be consistent with the teachings of the biblical authors and early church fathers on the Trinity. It is also important to note that there will be multiple senses of “identity” used throughout, which may become somewhat confusing. As such, it is important to distinguish the concept of *divine identity*, as described in the previous chapter, from *statements of identity*, as will be discussed, here. There is no doubt that the question, “Who is the Father?” is a question about identity, and as such, in the previous chapter has been answered through the concept of divine identity. However, trinitarian claims such as, “The Father is YHWH,” while expressing the identity of the Father, cannot be construed as statements of identity, as will be explained below. This distinction will become clearer once the distinction between the “is” of identity and predication is established, which we will now do.

Before applying the above distinction between the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication, it is important to define both. Beginning with the “is” of identity, Senor explains that this “is” essentially means, “is the same as.”<sup>305</sup> This interpretation of “is,” is an example of what I have been calling “statements of identity,” above. Simply put, to say that “A is B,” in this sense of identity, is to say that “A is the same as B,” or “A is identical to B.” When applied to God and the Trinity, this can become especially problematic. Take, for instance, the transitive nature of identity. As explained by Hasker, “Identity, as this notion is understood by logicians, is a relation that is symmetrical and transitive: if A is identical with B, and B with C, then A is identical with

---

<sup>305</sup> Senor, *The Incarnation and the Trinity*, 240.

C.”<sup>306</sup> An example would be to say that the head chef at a particular restaurant is Bob, and Bob is male. Using the transitive nature of identity, we can conclude that the head chef at this restaurant is male. Similarly, if the “is” in the claim “The Father is YHWH” is interpreted as the “is” of identity, then this would lead to the mistaken conclusion that the Father is triune. In other words, if YHWH is triune, and the Father is YHWH, the transitive nature of identity entails that the Father is triune.

The above conclusion demonstrates why the “is” in “The Father is YHWH” cannot be taken to be the “is” of predication, not simply because it entails unacceptable conclusions, but because it does not properly reflect trinitarian theology. In other words, this simply is not what Scripture and the early church fathers meant when making trinitarian claims such as that the Father is God. One of the key elements of trinitarian theology is the unity and distinction that exists within the Trinity. There is a sense in which the three Persons are one, and yet each Person is distinct from one another. Augustine, for example, notes,

To teach that according to the scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity; and therefore there are not three gods but one God; although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, himself coequal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the threefold unity. It was not however this same three that was born of the virgin Mary, crucified and buried under Pontius Pilate, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven, but the Son alone. Nor was it this same three that came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism...but the Holy Spirit. Nor was it this same three that spoke from heaven, *You are my Son*...but it was the Father’s voice alone addressing the Son.<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>306</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 59.

<sup>307</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Trinity* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 69-70.

Augustine has been chosen as representative of orthodox trinitarian thought, rather than one of the early church fathers, because his teachings, in a sense, reflect the culmination of the teachings that came before, and directly influenced the trinitarian development that came after.<sup>308</sup> In fact, it is Augustine's claim that the above teachings are precisely what the church fathers had taught before him.<sup>309</sup> In these statements, it is important to note that Augustine affirms the one God, the deity of the three Persons, and the distinction between the three Persons. Most notably, toward the end he clarifies that none of the divine Persons are the Trinity, in themselves, pointing to the different roles or actions that each Person has taken throughout history. Simply put, Augustine is teaching that, as Hasker puts it, "The Trinity is not identical with any one Person."<sup>310</sup> Yet, if "The Father is YHWH" is a statement of identity, this is *precisely* what it means, namely that the Trinity is, in fact, identical with one Person (the Father). As such, it is clear that the "is" of identity does not reflect orthodox trinitarian doctrine, and, therefore, should be rejected.

Lest Augustine not be sufficient to show that the above conclusion is correct, it should be noted that this same distinction can be found in Scripture and in the writings of the early church fathers. The Pauline Pattern, for example, shows a distinction between the Father and the Son, and yet Paul's reformulation of the Shema shows unity within the identity of God. As such, neither the Father nor the Son, in the Pauline Pattern, are identical with YHWH, but rather are part of YHWH's divine identity. Furthermore, while the Father (Rom. 9:27-29), the Son (1 Cor. 2:16), and the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 3:5) are all identified with YHWH throughout Scripture, they

---

<sup>308</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. IV (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1986), 427.

<sup>309</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, 69.

<sup>310</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 205.

are also described as distinct from one another, even interacting with one another in various ways (Matt. 3:16-17, for example).<sup>311</sup> Similarly, Origen affirmed a certain hierarchy of divinity within the Trinity,<sup>312</sup> which would not be possible if any Person was identical with YHWH. Basil of Caesarea, too, affirms the equality between the Father and the Son,<sup>313</sup> while still maintaining their distinction,<sup>314</sup> and Gregory of Nazianzus affirms the orthodox trinitarian claim that God is one in three.<sup>315</sup>

None of the above claims are compatible with the claim that “The Father is identical with YHWH,” which would be the implication if the “is” in “The Father is YHWH” were interpreted as the “is” of identity. Simply put, orthodox trinitarian theology, throughout Scripture and in the writings of the early church fathers, affirms both a unity and a distinction within the Trinity that collapses if “The Father is YHWH” is interpreted as a statement of identity. As explained by Wierenga, “If each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are identical with God, they are all identical with each other. So, like modalism, this suggestion does not give us a trinity of divine Persons.”<sup>316</sup> It is clear, then, that the “is” of identity does not reflect the orthodox trinitarian teachings of Scripture and the early church fathers, and as such cannot be the correct way in

---

<sup>311</sup> The Holy Spirit’s identification with YHWH is not as clear as in the case of Jesus, but the passage cited as evidence for this identification notes “the Lord,” as distinct from God and Christ. As such, the inference is that “the Lord” in this passage is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also described as giving the spiritual gifts, which is also attributed to God in 1 Cor. 12:28-31 and James 1:17. A further case can be made for the Spirit’s identification with YHWH, but that goes beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>312</sup> Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 184.

<sup>313</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius*, 120.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>315</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 28*, 41.

<sup>316</sup> Edward Wierenga, “Trinity and Polytheism,” *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of the Christian Philosophers* (July 2004), 288.

which to interpret statements such as, “The Father is YHWH.” Somehow, orthodox trinitarian theology maintains that the Father is YHWH, that YHWH is triune, and yet the Father is *not* triune. This brings us to the second way in which the “is” in “The Father is YHWH” may be understood, namely the “is” of predication.

The term, *predication*, may be defined as, “the attributing of characteristics to a subject to produce a meaningful statement combining verbal and nominal elements.”<sup>317</sup> Applying this to the Father, the claim is that to say, “The Father is God,” is to attribute certain divine characteristics to the Father. As Wierenga explains, if the “is” in the statement, “The Father is God,” is an “is” of predication, what this statement is essentially claiming is that “the Father is divine.”<sup>318</sup> In other words, “God” is a title that is virtually synonymous with “possesses the divine attributes,” and when we say that “The Father is God,” all that is being said is that the Father possesses these divine attributes. As explained by Marianne Thompson, “God” is not a proper name, “but a term that makes a predication about the person or reality so named.”<sup>319</sup> Hasker builds upon this meaning of “God,” interpreting John 1:1-3 as essentially affirming that “the Logos has the property of Godhood or deity.”<sup>320</sup> Thomas Senior concurs, stating that, “To affirm that *Jesus is God* is to affirm his deity.”<sup>321</sup>

---

<sup>317</sup> “Predication,” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/predication>, Last Accessed March 23, 2022.

<sup>318</sup> Wierenga, *Trinity and Polytheism*, 288.

<sup>319</sup> Hasker, *Megaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, 188.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>321</sup> Senior, *The Incarnation and the Trinity*, 240.

This understanding of “God” also seems to be the case in much Nicene and post-Nicene theology. For example, Kelly affirms that, after the Arian debate, the term “Godhead” began to take on the meaning of the divine attributes, rather than referring simply to the first Person of the Trinity.<sup>322</sup> To possess the Godhead, or to be the Godhead, simply meant to possess the divine attributes.<sup>323</sup> This term, “Godhead,” is essentially synonymous with the earlier concept of “Monarchy,” and fits with modern trinitarian uses of “God,” which oftentimes is taken to simply mean either “divine” (in reference to the Persons of the Trinity), or “The Trinity” (in reference to God, as a whole).<sup>324</sup> Tertullian is more explicit, stating, “God is the name for the substance, that is, the divinity.”<sup>325</sup> Similarly, Athanasius used this concept of Monarchy or Godhead in reference to the Trinity as a whole, and the Cappadocian Fathers used it as a way to incorporate the notions of substance and nature into God’s Being.<sup>326</sup> Simply put, then, the trinitarian claims such as, “The Father is God,” have historically been taken to mean, not that the Father is identical with the triune God, but that the Father possesses the divine attributes, and this is perfectly reflected by the “is” of predication.<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>322</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 242.

<sup>323</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 29*, 55.

<sup>324</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2018), 206.

<sup>325</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 114.

<sup>326</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 178, 183.

<sup>327</sup> The use of “Godhead” is a bit more complex than I describe here, however. In the writings of the pre-Nicene church fathers, for example, “Godhead” was typically reserved for the Father, whereas the Son and the Spirit participated in this Godhead in a derivative way. Post-Nicene church fathers, however, began to use the term as is being described, here, namely as synonymous with the divine attributes. However, the later church fathers also used the term as a reference to the Trinity, and sometimes even used it in distinction with “God,” the latter referring to the divine attributes, or to any one Person of the Trinity. In general, however, the term usually refers to whatever makes God, God.

This interpretation allows for at least two uses of the title “God,” and can be used to clarify certain confusions. For example, the previous chapter cited two denominational faith statements that proclaimed, first, that God is triune, and secondly, that God is the Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>328</sup> It was explained that these claims can be confusing, for they imply that the very same triune God is the Father of Jesus Christ, which would mean that the Father of Jesus Christ is triune. However, it is not that there is confusion about who God is, but rather that two uses of “God” are being expressed, with no clarification. The first claim refers to the Trinity, whereas the second claim refers to the first Person of the Trinity. The second claim can only make sense, however, if “God” is not used as a statement of identity, entailing that the Father is identical to the triune God, but as a predication, pointing to the divine attributes. In this sense, to say that “God is the Father of Christ” would be the same as saying “The Father of Christ is God.” If either of these claims are interpreted as statements of identity, meaning that “God” and “The Father” are identical, then they simply would not make sense within trinitarian doctrine. As such, it seems correct to interpret the “is” in the claim, “The Father is God,” as the “is” of predication, allowing for at least two uses of the term “God,” which brings clarity to the claim, and to similar claims (such as that God is the Father of Christ).

It is important to note that everything that has been said, thus far, about the “is” of predication has only been applied to “The Father is God.” What is being discussed here, however, is not merely the claim that the Father is God, but that the Father is YHWH. As such, it is my contention that what is said about the “is” of predication in respect to “The Father is God,” can be equally said in respect to the claim that “The Father is YHWH,” even though “YHWH” is a personal name, whereas “God” is a title. The only claim that needs to be accepted for this to be

---

<sup>328</sup> Sandra García and Fernando Cruz, eds., *Declaración de Fe y Orden de la Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico: Iglesia Evangélica de Puerto Rico, 1999), B.

the case is that there are certain essential properties that belong only to YHWH. If this is the case, then it follows that to claim that the Father is YHWH is merely to claim that the Father possess the essential properties of YHWH. This would mean that “YHWH” is not *just* a personal name, but that it also says something about God’s nature. In the same way in which “God” can be used in different ways, either in reference to the Trinity, to any one Person within the Trinity, or as synonymous with the divine attributes, YHWH can be used in different ways, as well. As will now be shown, there is even some biblical precedence for this practice.

Throughout Scripture, names are often attributed to people based on specific qualities within that person, or as representative of important elements within their story. The name of Adam, for example, simply means “man” or “mankind,” pointing precisely to the fact that Adam was the first man, but also a representative of mankind.<sup>329</sup> Similarly, the woman was called a woman specifically because “she was taken out of man” (Gen. 2:23).<sup>330</sup> Furthermore, the woman was given the personal name of *Eve*, “because she would become the mother of all the living” (Gen. 3:20).<sup>331</sup> Similarly, Abram’s name (which means “exalted father”) was changed by God to *Abraham*, which means “father of many,” pointing to God’s promise of making him the “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:4-5). Isaac’s name means “laughter,” which points to Abraham’s reaction to God’s promise of descendants (Gen. 17:17, 19). Jacob’s name means “follower, replacer, one who follows at the heel,” pointing both to the way in which he was born, grabbing at Esau’s heel (Gen. 25:26), and to what would later happen between he and Esau regarding the primogeniture’s inheritance. Even in the case of Jesus, which means “Yahweh saves,” note how

---

<sup>329</sup> John H. Walton, “A Historical Adam: Archetypal Creation View,” *Four Views on the Historical Adam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 91.

<sup>330</sup> In the Hebrew, the word for “woman” (*isha*) sounds like “man” (*ish*).

<sup>331</sup> According to Strong’s *NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, the name “Eve” means “life.”



He was to be called “Immanuel,” which means “God with us” (Mt. 1:23), clearly pointing to who Jesus was, and what He came to do.

Countless more examples could be given about the meaning and significance of names throughout Scripture, but the above examples should be sufficient to show that, oftentimes, the giving of a name was purposeful, pointing to an important attribute or action of the person being named, or a significant element in his or her story. This seems to be the common practice throughout Scripture, so much so that one begins to wonder if these were the actual names of these people, or whether they might have been given these names by the biblical authors for the purposes of the narratives. The biblical names, then, were not mere personal pronouns, but forms of identification that oftentimes point beyond the name, itself.<sup>332</sup> Given the prominence of this practice concerning the biblical names, it seems likely that this would also be the case concerning God’s name, YHWH. This seems to be Tertullian’s belief who, although referring specifically to the “names” of “Father” and “Son,” nevertheless affirms that, “All things will be what their names represent them to be; and what they are and ever will be, that will they be called.”<sup>333</sup> Similarly, Basil of Caesarea, also pointing to the “names” of “Father” and “Son,” states that names signify “the distinctive features that characterize the individual.”<sup>334</sup>

This understanding of God’s name goes further back than the early church fathers, however, for second-temple rabbis understood God’s Hebrew names as standing for mercy and justice, and Philo “understood the names of God as symbols for His attributes.”<sup>335</sup> Rabbi Rashi

---

<sup>332</sup> Nico Daams, “Translating YHWH ‘Elohim,’” *Bible Translator*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2011), 226.

<sup>333</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, ch. 9.

<sup>334</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius*, 134.

<sup>335</sup> Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 262.

also interprets God's revelation of His name to Moses in Exodus 3:14 as pointing to what God has and will do in and through Israel.<sup>336</sup> More modern theologians also affirm this understanding of the name of God. Soulen, for example, affirms that the name of God "expresses the *particular otherness* of the biblically attested God."<sup>337</sup> This view is very similar to Bauckham's view of divine identity, and as such Bauckham affirms that YHWH "names the unique identity of God."<sup>338</sup> McBrien offers a similar position, which is found throughout Scripture, as well, namely that to know God's name is to know God."<sup>339</sup> This is why Scripture can speak about praising God's name, implying that doing so is the same as praising God (Ps. 145:2, for example).

The purpose of this brief survey is to show that the name of God, throughout Scripture, second-temple literature, and in the writings of the early church fathers, was more than just a personal pronoun. The name of God represents who God is, what He is, and what He does (including what He has done and will do). Who God is and what He does is reflected in the concept of divine identity explained in the previous chapter, whereas what He is reflects the idea of God's nature, as it has been explained in this chapter. As such, the divine name points to a harmonization between divine identity and divine nature, although for purposes of clarity, these two are being treated separately, here. YHWH is a divine name, a personal name, a name that is exclusive to the God of Israel, but it is also *more* than a name. The name of God represents who and what He is, and as such can *only* belong to Him, for only He is who and what He is. This last

---

<sup>336</sup> *La Torá con Rashí: Éxodo* (Mexico: Editorial Jerusalem de México, 2002), 35.

<sup>337</sup> Soulen, *YHWH the Triune God*, 37.

<sup>338</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 129.

<sup>339</sup> McBrien, *Catholicism*, 279.

point may seem redundant, but it will be very important when discussing possible objections, later.

The main point being made here is that there is something unique about the God of Israel, namely His divine identity and His essential attributes, and that this uniqueness is reflected in the divine name. As such, whoever (rightly) has this name, shares in this identity, and possesses these attributes.<sup>340</sup> Simply put, to be YHWH is to be God. Furthermore, as explained, above, to be God is to possess the divine attributes. From this, the conclusion may be drawn that the claim, “The Father is YHWH,” where the “is” is an “is” of predication, is the virtual equivalent of saying, “The Father possesses the divine attributes.” This is not to say that “YHWH” is synonymous or completely interchangeable with “God,” as though the divine name were not important, significant, or as though it were replaceable. The fact remains that “YHWH” is God’s name; His *personal* name, “by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation” (Ex. 3:15), whereas “God” is a title or predicate.<sup>341</sup> As such, the divine name is not replaceable with any other title. However, the divine name is not just a form of identification, rather it points to certain attributes of the one God, as explained, above. As such, when it comes to the claim that the Father is YHWH, what is being proposed, here, is that the *meaning* of this claim is that the Father possesses the divine attributes that are unique to YHWH, and in this sense, He *is* YHWH.

The above interpretation of, “The Father is YHWH,” reflects the trinitarian theology expressed throughout Scripture and in the writings of the early church fathers. As highlighted,

---

<sup>340</sup> The reason I make the clarification of “rightly” is because, as Tertullian explains, pagans incorrectly attributed to other gods and idols the title of “God,” for only YHWH possesses the divine attributes that are necessary to be God. Similarly, although there is no clear example of this, in theory someone could attribute the divine name to a false god or idol, but this would be wrong, for these idols do not share in the divine identity, nor possess the divine attributes. As such, to “rightly” have the divine name means to also share in this identity and possess these attributes.

<sup>341</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, 32.

above, one of the key elements within this trinitarian theology is the unity and distinction between the Persons of the Trinity. Interpreting the “is” in “The Father is YHWH” as an “is” of predication allows the Father to be included in the divine identity of YHWH (unity), while avoiding the problems that arise from interpreting it as an identity statement (distinction). This also allows for the Son and the Holy Spirit to share in this identity, possessing the divine attributes, and as such being YHWH in the same sense, and to the same degree, as the Father, while remaining distinct from one another.<sup>342</sup> Simply put, to say that the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit “is YHWH” is simply to say that all three possess the divine attributes, share in the one divine identity, and as such are all God. There are, however, a few possible objections to this interpretation which will now be discussed.

### **Objections**

The first objection to the interpretation that is being proposed, here, concerns the categorization of YHWH’s triunity. The conclusion from the above analysis is that to say that the Father is YHWH is simply to say that He possesses the divine attributes. However, along with being eternal, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, etc., and any other attribute that may fall under that category, YHWH is also triune. At the very least, this is the view that is widely held within Christianity.<sup>343</sup> As such, even with the “is” of predication, we seem to run into the same problem that arose with the “is” of identity, mentioned above, namely that, if YHWH is triune, and the

---

<sup>342</sup> Some church fathers maintain that the Father possesses the Godhead to a greater degree than the Son and the Spirit; that He is the source of the Godhead, whereas the Son and the Spirit possess the Godhead derivatively. I am not sure, as of this moment, how to feel about this, for it is easy to conclude some form of subordinationism, from this view. However, it is the predominant view throughout the early church fathers and requires further study before incorporating it into the topic of this dissertation.

<sup>343</sup> Soulen, *YHWH the Triune God*, 32.

Father is YHWH, then the Father must also be triune. This is surely to be the case if, in fact, triunity is one of the essential attributes of God. However, it is my contention that this is not necessarily the case. I contend that it is better to speak of triunity in terms of God's divine identity, rather than His divine nature.<sup>344</sup> If this is the case, then triunity will not be one of the predications made of the Father in the statement, "The Father is YHWH." As such, if triunity is part of God's identity, rather than His nature, then the Father would simply be included in this identity, rather than possessing triunity as an essential attribute.

An argument for triunity corresponding to God's identity, rather than His nature, can be found in my previous discussion on God's nature, itself. In that discussion, I noted that God's essential attributes are whatever attributes are necessary for God to be God. I further noted that the attributes that are commonly included in this list are those that possess intrinsic maxima, or peak values. When thinking about triunity, it does not seem immediately obvious to me that it can be expressed in terms of intrinsic maxima. I know that some Christians have attempted to argue for three Persons as ideal for an ultimate expression of God's love (such as Augustine), but I see no reason outside of convenience to say that three is better than four, or five, or an infinity of Persons. As such, triunity does not seem to fit the criteria that has been established, here, concerning God's essential attributes, and for this reason I believe that it fits best in terms of God's identity. As noted by Soulen, "The doctrine of the Trinity is the specifically Christian answer to the question, 'Who is God?'"<sup>345</sup> Soulen notes that Barth makes a similar claim, stating

---

<sup>344</sup> Once again, the two are treated separately for clarity, but ultimately God's identity and nature are inseparable. YHWH is who He is, and what He is; never one or the other. This is one of the reasons why I noted in the first chapter that this paper will be dealing, primarily, with how we speak about God, rather than how the Trinity works on an ontological level.

<sup>345</sup> Soulen, "YHWH the Triune God," 25.

that the question “Who is God?” precedes and controls the question, “What is God?”; the doctrine of the Trinity being the answer to the former.<sup>346</sup>

This interpretation and categorization reflects the two ways in which the terms “God” and “YHWH” have been understood, namely as expressing deity *and* identity, and harmonizes with what is taught throughout Scripture and the writings of the early church fathers about God. The value of this interpretation is summarized as follows. First, the “is” of predication in the statement, “The Father is YHWH,” means that the Father possesses the divine attributes, and as such is God. Second, placing triunity under the category of identity, rather than nature, allows for the Father to be God, and yet not be triune. Lastly, the notion of divine identity allows for the Father (and the Son and the Spirit) to be included in that one identity, while remaining distinct from one another. All of this, together, reflects the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, especially the unity and distinction between the Persons of the Trinity, in a way that offers a bit more clarity, while avoiding the problems that arise out of not carefully making these distinctions.

Another objection to what is being proposed, here, is nothing new to trinitarian discussions. Simply put, if three distinct Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) possess the divine attributes, this means that three distinct Persons are God. As such, how can one avoid the conclusion that there are three Gods, rather than one? This is where the concept of divine identity and God’s nature truly comes together. The following quote will help to demonstrate the value of divine identity in responding to this objection. Craig notes,

Back in the hey-day of the so-called History of Religions school, scholars in comparative religion collected parallels to Christian beliefs in other religious movements, and some thought to explain those beliefs (including belief in Jesus’ resurrection) as the result of the influence of such myths. Today, however, scarcely any scholar thinks of myth as an important interpretive category for the Gospels. Scholars came to realize that pagan mythology is simply the wrong interpretive

---

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 36.

context for understanding Jesus of Nazareth. . . For Jesus and his disciples were first century Palestinian Jews, and it is against that background that they must be understood. The Jewish reclamation of Jesus has helped to make unjustified any understanding of the Gospels' portrait of Jesus as significantly shaped by mythology.<sup>347</sup>

By identifying the correct interpretive lens through which to study the historical Jesus, scholars conclude that it is a mistake to claim that the story of Jesus was simply a copy of pagan myths. In a similar vein, the question about the “three Gods” ignores the fact that the authors of the New Testament were primarily first-century Jews. As such, they would have rejected any teaching that implied any sort of polytheism. Yet, even so, they affirmed the deity of Christ. This objection also ignores the fact that, for centuries, no Christian who affirms the Trinity has become a polytheist. If polytheism, or tri-theism, is the logical implication of the doctrine of the Trinity, it seems odd that it was born out of a strictly monotheistic context, and that those that affirm the Trinity reject such tri-theism. It seems, then, that a piece of the puzzle is missing from this objection; something that can explain why trinitarians reject tri-theism. I contend that what is missing is the interpretive lens through which the doctrine of the Trinity first arose, namely that of divine identity.

When Paul reformulates, in a sense, the Shema to include the Father and the Son, he continues to affirm the monotheism that is entailed in the Shema.<sup>348</sup> This is because Paul viewed the Shema through the lens of divine identity, which allowed for such a reformulation. As explained in previous chapters, YHWH's divine identity included two identifying features, namely His relation to Israel and His relation to all reality.<sup>349</sup> Even God's nature was viewed

---

<sup>347</sup> William Lane Craig, “Jesus and Pagan Mythology,” (Jan. 2009), <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/jesus-and-pagan-mythology>.

<sup>348</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, loc. 2468, 2680.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

through this lens, as is the case for God’s eternity. As noted by Bauckham, “That God is eternal, for example – a claim essential to all Jewish thinking about God – is not so much a statement about what divine nature is, more an element in the unique divine identity.”<sup>350</sup> Within these two categories, God was identified primarily as Creator, Sovereign Ruler, and Redeemer. For second-temple Jews, only God created the Universe, only God rules over the Universe, and only God chose (redeemed) Israel (and will do so with others, as well). This is what separated or distinguished YHWH from any other god or created thing. This is the reason the New Testament’s inclusion of Jesus in Creation (Jn. 1:3), Sovereignty (Mt. 28:18), and Redemption (Eph. 1:7) is so significant, for in doing so, the authors of the New Testament are identifying Him with YHWH.

Simply put, only YHWH has these attributes and performs these actions. As such, the attribution of these attributes and actions to anyone is to affirm that that person is YHWH. Note that, within second-temple Judaism, the divine identity belongs *only* to YHWH. Therefore, to attribute this divine identity to Jesus was not to say that there are now two Beings who possess this divine identity. Rather, the implication is that Jesus is YHWH. This is how first-century Jews, like the authors of the New Testament, would have understood these claims, and as such would not have even considered any sort of tri-theism. Similar to how the proper interpretive lens through which to view the historical Jesus is second-temple Judaism, rather than Greek mythology, the proper lens through which to view trinitarian theology is the divine identity of second-temple Judaism. Seen through this lens, it is not even conceivable that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would have been seen as three Gods. Rather, in saying that all three possess the divine attributes, and share the divine identity, it would have readily been understood

---

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.



that the claim being made was simply that all three are the same God. The notion of divine identity would not have allowed any other interpretation.

A parallel argument to what is being expressed, here, can be seen in Anselm's perfect Being theology. If God is the Supreme Being, or the greatest conceivable Being, then there can be no other being with equal or more greatness. The very notion of the greatest conceivable Being entails that there be only one. As an analogy, let us say that Mark is the tallest person on Earth. Such a claim, if true, prohibits that there be any other person that is just as tall, or taller, than Mark. If there were just *one* person that is as tall as Mark, he would no longer be the tallest person on Earth, rather there would simply be two people who are taller than everyone else. Similarly, if God is the greatest conceivable Being, there can be no one else who is as great, or greater than God, for He would no longer be the greatest conceivable Being. It should be noted, as was explained, above, that God's greatness is defined as possessing certain attributes that have *intrinsic maxima*, such as omnipotence and eternity.<sup>351</sup> The implication, then, is that, since God possesses these attributes, He is the greatest conceivable Being, and He is the greatest conceivable Being because He possesses these attributes. With this interpretive lens in mind, the point is that, if the Father possesses these attributes, He is not a second God, rather He is the very *same* God that is the greatest conceivable Being. The same would apply to the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>352</sup>

In summary, given the interpretive lens through which the doctrine of the Trinity was originally formulated, there is no possibility for tri-theism, much less polytheism. The claim that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit possess the divine attributes is made within the context

---

<sup>351</sup> Craig & Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 497.

<sup>352</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 242, 257.

of divine identity. As such, the possession of the divine attributes does not make them three Gods, rather it shows that they are included in the one divine identity of YHWH. Any claim of tri-theism ignores this theological context and interpretive lens, and as such is completely foreign to the doctrine of the Trinity.

One final objection to applying the “is” of predication to trinitarian claims such as, “The Father is YHWH,” is that not all languages include the verb “is.” For example, Wierenga notes that, in the Latin, certain trinitarian claims do not even include the verb. He notes, “There is, of course, something to this objection. After all, as we saw above, the Latin sentence, (13) *Ita deus Pater, deus Filius, deus Spiritus sanctus*, does not even bother to include the copula ‘*est*’. Moreover, ‘*deus*’ is definitely a noun; if the Latin had intended to make a predication, it could have used the adjective ‘*divinus*’.”<sup>353</sup> Wierenga is citing Augustine’s *Quicumque Vult* for this example, as representative of trinitarian theology. However, this example does not parallel closely enough the trinitarian claim being discussed, here. Wierenga goes on to note that other statements are made in the *Quicumque Vult* that are better translated as predications, such as, “*Qualis Pater, talis Filius, talis et Spiritus sanctus*,” which can be translated as, “For any divine attribute the Father has, the Son has it, and so does the Holy Spirit,” pointing to the attributes listed by Augustine, elsewhere in the text.<sup>354</sup> As such, these statements can be translated using the “is” of predication, or similar verbs that offer the same meaning.

I believe that the objection focuses too narrowly on the verb, itself, rather than on what the verb entails. As explained, here, the verb (in English) in the statement, “The Father is YHWH,” is meant to be a predication about the Father. The question is, then, whether this same

---

<sup>353</sup> Wierenga, *Trinity and Polytheism*, 289.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*

predication is made in other languages, especially in Greek and Latin (Greek being the language of the New Testament, and Latin being the language of the later church), irrespective of the usage of the verb “is.” The answer to this question is a resounding, yes, for this is the entire point of the trinitarian debate during the first four centuries. In other words, the entire debate was centered on who (or what) God is, and whether Jesus (and, later, the Holy Spirit) also possessed this identity or these attributes. When the trinitarian creeds such as the Nicene and the Athanasian Creed were formulated, the purpose was to affirm that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all possess the divine attributes, and as such are all God. In other words, these creeds reflect this notion of predication that is being defended, here, even if, when translated into other languages, the verb “is,” is absent. What matters is the meaning behind these statements, not the specific words that are used to express this meaning in different languages. In English, the verb happens to be “is,” and as such it is perfectly valid to question how to interpret this verb, concluding that it should be interpreted as an “is” of predication.

### **Conclusion**

The previous two chapters sought to answer the question about the identity of the Father by surveying the biblical texts and evaluating Bauckham’s notion of divine identity. The biblical texts, along with the writings of the early church fathers, lead to the conclusion that the Father is YHWH. Further exploration led to the clarification that the Father is included in the divine identity of YHWH. While this answer seems correct, it is nevertheless incomplete without a discussion about God’s nature. The main reason for this is that God’s nature was the main point of discussion in the trinitarian debates of the first four centuries. Furthermore, the inclusion of the Father in the divine identity, without discussion of God’s nature, leads to the mistaken conclusion that the Father is only part of God, and as such is not fully God, Himself. This,

however, does not reflect orthodox trinitarian doctrine. As such, the focus of this chapter has been God's nature, beginning with the question of whether God has a nature.

After answering the question about God's nature in the affirmative, the discussion moved on to attempting to describe or define this nature. Although it does not seem possible to form an exhaustive list of God's essential attributes, after surveying Scripture, some second-temple literature, and some of the writings of the early church fathers, a few common attributes began to stand out. The attribute of *eternity* is by far the most common essential attribute throughout all of these writings and was the main attribute at the center of trinitarian debates. Some other attributes include omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. As explained by Plantinga, Craig, and others, these attributes stand out above other attributes as candidates for God's essential attributes due to the fact that they have *intrinsic maxima*, or peak values. This notion of *intrinsic maxima* is part of a larger argument for God's existence, put forth most notably by St. Anselm, namely the ontological argument.

Following the discussion of God's nature, it was shown that there are two senses in which the statement, "The Father is YHWH," can be understood, focusing on the verb "is." The first sense in which this statement can be understood is by interpreting the "is" as an "is" of identity, or what I call a statement of identity. If the statement, "The Father is YHWH," is, in fact, a statement of identity, then what is being claimed is that the Father is identical with YHWH. Given the transitive nature of identity, however, this interpretation runs into the problematic implication that the Father is triune (for YHWH is triune). As such, this interpretation must be rejected. The second way in which to interpret the "is" in this statement is as an "is" of predication. Interpreted in this way means that to say that the Father is YHWH is simply to say that He possesses the divine attributes. In other words, the statement is a claim to deity, i.e., the

Father is God. To strengthen this interpretation, it was shown that the divine name is not just a personal name, but, rather, it points to certain attributes. As such, the divine attributes are not simply sufficient for deity, rather they belong exclusively to the God of Israel. As such, possession of the divine name entails the possession of these divine attributes.

Continuing the discussion was an analysis of possible objections to the above interpretation, beginning with the categorization of *triunity*. While the “is” of predication seems to be the best way in which to interpret the statement, “The Father is YHWH, we still do not fully avoid the implication that the Father is triune. However, it was shown that this is only a problem if triunity is, in fact, a divine attribute. As such, it was argued that triunity is not an essential divine attribute, but, rather, better fits under the category of identity. This was shown to be the case throughout Scripture, the writings of the early church fathers, and modern theologians. Simply put, whenever any attempt is made at listing out the divine attributes, rarely, if ever, is triunity included in these lists. This shows that triunity was never understood to be an essential attribute, but nevertheless YHWH was understood to be triune. The best explanation for this is to say that triunity is part of YHWH’s identity, rather than His nature. Furthermore, this categorization makes the most sense within trinitarian doctrine, allowing for the Father (and the Son, and the Holy Spirit) to possess the divine attributes, while avoiding the implication that He is triune. It also allows for the Father’s inclusion in the divine identity, since this divine identity is triune.

The next objection that was noted is one of the oldest objections to the Trinity, in general. Simply put, if the three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) possess the divine attributes, and as such all three are God, then this seems to imply that there are three Gods. However, it was shown that this objection is a misunderstanding of the context in which trinitarian doctrine was

formulated. The correct interpretive lens through which trinitarian doctrine needs to be studied is through the notion of divine identity. What this lens shows is that, for second-temple Jews, which includes the authors of the New Testament, certain actions and attributes belong only to YHWH. As such, any being that takes part in these actions (Creation, Sovereign Rule, and Redemption) and possesses these attributes is not simply another God, rather He is the *same* God of Israel. To say that Jesus, for example, created the Universe, forgives sins, and has all authority on Earth is another way of saying that Jesus is YHWH. The one divine identity, then, does not allow for any sort of polytheism. What it implies is that, if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all possess the divine attributes, then all three are the same God of Israel. As such, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are included in the divine identity, for the divine identity is triune.

This entire discussion shows how the notion of divine identity allows for a harmonization between God's nature and His identity. As a result, we can rightly affirm that God is one, yet three, while avoiding any sort of contradiction. This is especially the case with the use of the "is" of predication, and the categorization of triunity under God's identity, rather than His nature. Putting all of these pieces of the puzzle together, and centering, once again, on the main question concerning the identity of the Father, a more complete answer can finally be given. Simply put, the answer to the question, "Who is the Father?" is that the Father is YHWH. In what sense is the Father YHWH? In the sense that He possesses the divine attributes and is included in the divine identity. This can be applied to the other two Persons of the Trinity, showing that they, too, are fully God.

However, given the interpretive lens of divine identity, we can see that, while all three are God, they are not three Gods, but the very same God. This is only possible if YHWH's divine identity is triune, which allows for the inclusion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in that one

divine identity. Nothing new has actually been said about the doctrine of the Trinity, for the conclusion seems to be the same as has been concluded throughout all of church history, namely that God is one, yet three, with no contradiction. The difference is that with the notion of divine identity, alongside the “is” of predication, certain distinctions can be made when speaking about the Trinity that allow for a greater degree of clarity, while avoiding any apparent contradiction concerning the identity of the Father. As such, this discussion allows for a more coherent way to express the core elements of the doctrine of the Trinity.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING MATTERS

### Initial Problems and Thesis

The doctrine of the Trinity is not only central to Christianity, but it is *the* distinguishing doctrine that separates Christianity from all other religions. To be sure, there are other key distinctions, but very few, if any, as central as the doctrine of the Trinity. One of the most common ways in which the Trinity is expressed is by the formula, “one Being, three Persons.” This formula, simple as it may be, is itself incredibly controversial, and brings about many questions that need further clarification to correctly understand what is being said. For example, what is a “being,” and how is this different from a “person”? How is *personhood* defined, and is it the same for God, as it is for human beings? Is “being” another word for “substance,” “hypostasis,” “Godhead,” and similar terms that have been used throughout church history?<sup>355</sup> These and many other questions have been asked since these formulations were originally expressed by the early church fathers, and continue to be asked, today.

Even with all these questions, the basic idea that is being expressed in the formula, above, is understood by most, to varying degrees. While most may not be able to explain how the Trinity works, they will know that the claims being made are that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; yet, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father, nor the Son. Most Christians also understand that these trinitarian claims do not entail three Gods, but only one, namely the God of Israel, known as YHWH.<sup>356</sup> These trinitarian conclusions and formulations are the result of centuries of debates

---

<sup>355</sup> For an in-depth discussion on these questions, and how these terms have been used throughout church history, see William Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), chs. 3-6.

<sup>356</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, “YHWH the Triune God,” *Modern Theology*, 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1999), 32.



and discussions, beginning with Scripture, moving on to the early church fathers, and continuing to this day. However, most of these debates, especially early on, centered around the deity of Christ, and His relation to the Father. Later, the discussion moved to the deity and worship of the Holy Spirit, and His relation to both the Father and the Son. The deity and identity of the Father, historically speaking, seems to have always simply been assumed. As such, very little has been said about the Father and His relation to the God of Israel.

As was explained in the first chapter, this omission has proven to be somewhat problematic, yet very few seem to notice the issue. The main question that this dissertation sought to answer was, “Who is the Father?” The identity of the Father has always been assumed, but certain trinitarian claims show that this identity is not always clear. Terms or titles such as “Father,” and “God” are used interchangeably, while at the same time being used in different ways, without taking the time to clarify these different uses. The result is, for example, confessions of faith that begin by affirming that God is triune, and then continue affirming that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>357</sup> While this may not seem confusing, initially, further reflection shows that, if God is triune, and Jesus is the Son of God, then that would mean that Jesus is the Son of the triune God. Furthermore, if God is the Father, the very same Father of Jesus, the first Person of the Trinity, yet God is also triune, this would mean that the Father is triune, as well. These mistaken conclusions show that the title of “God” is being used in more than one way, but no attempt at clarification is usually made.

The above confusions is what led to the main topic of this dissertation, namely seeking to clarify the identity of the Father, while offering some more clarity to trinitarian claims such as “The Father is YHWH.” With this trinitarian claim at the center of the discussion, the thesis that

---

<sup>357</sup> Sandra García and Fernando Cruz, eds., *Declaración de Fe y Orden de la Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico: Iglesia Evangélica de Puerto Rico, 1999), B.

was sought to be defended was that applying the distinction between the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication to the doctrine of the Trinity can help clarify the identity of the Father, in relation to YHWH, and resolve any possible contradiction of identities. This was to be done, first, by searching out how Scripture identifies the Father, followed by how the early church fathers identified the Father, and offering a preliminary answer to the question, “Who is the Father?” From here, the discussion moved toward the notion of divine identity, as defined by Richard Bauckham, showing how this notion offers further clarification to the answer offered in the previous chapter. Lastly, a discussion concerning the nature of God led to the application of the “is” of predication to the claim, “The Father is God,” concluding with how the divine identity offers an interpretive lens through which to view the Trinity. What follows is a summary of each chapter, pointing out certain possible objections, along the way, that were not mentioned in the chapters, themselves, concluding with the final answer that is being proposed, here, concerning the identity of the Father. This chapter will end by showing how this discussion has practical applications for Christians, and by pointing out areas for further study.

## **Chapter Summaries**

### Chapter 1

The first chapter began by defining some key terms and outlining my main purpose and methodology. My intentions were to begin with Scripture, attempting to identify how the Bible speaks about the Father, and carry this on to the writings of the early church fathers. The main goal at the beginning was to trace the foundations that led to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, centering the discussion on the identity of the Father. I was hoping to show how the identity of the Father evolved from the Old Testament, into the New Testament, and continuing through the writings of the early church fathers to today. From here, I predicted that there would

emerge two possible interpretations of the Father's identity, one pointing to the God of Israel, the other pointing more specifically to the first Person of the Trinity. It was readily apparent that this distinction was not as clear as I had hoped, but that the identity of the Father has been consistent throughout all of church history. Nevertheless, the goal was to show how this identity could be expressed with more clarity, applying the "is" of identity and predication to the claim, "The Father is YHWH," and as such the second chapter began this process.

## Chapter 2

The second chapter began to trace the identity of the Father throughout Scripture, beginning with the Old Testament. As was shown, YHWH was rarely called "Father" in the Old Testament, and most of the references to Him as "Father" were centered on God's relationship with Israel. This relationship, itself, was primarily described in terms of God's choosing and redeeming Israel, especially from Egypt, but also in terms of God as the Creator of the Universe. On occasion, God is described as a Father in relation to kingship, as in His relationship with David (1 Sam. 7, for example), and on at least two occasions He is described as a Father in relation to the Messiah. It is this latter description of God as a Father that is much more personal than other uses, pointing to a special relationship between the Father and His Messiah (Ps. 2:7). This view of God as a Father is also reflected in the second-temple Jewish literature.

As with the biblical passages, God is described as a Father primarily in terms of His role as Creator, His choosing and redeeming Israel, and in relation with His Messiah. Rarely is God called "Father" in relation to all people, although this can be extrapolated through certain passages that describe Him in more general terms, such as "A father to the fatherless" (Ps. 89:26). These passages speak in such terms that may be applied to all people, rather than specifically to Israel. Nevertheless, this is not the main way in which God is described as a

Father in the Old Testament, nor in the second-temple Jewish literature. He is usually described as the Father of Israel, kings, or the Messiah, and only the latter description consistently uses more personal terms, pointing to a special relationship. The key takeaway from the uses of the title “Father” in the Old Testament and in the second-temple literature is that the subject of the title is none other than the God of Israel, YHWH. This is important when reading the New Testament’s use of this title for God.

The New Testament’s description of God as the Father is radically much more personal than that of the Old Testament, and it occurs with much more frequency. Once again, the term is usually applied specifically to describe God’s relationship either with believers or with Christ (as it primarily described, in the Old Testament, God’s relationship with Israel and the Messiah), and rarely is He called “Father” in general terms (as the Father of all people, for example). However, it was shown that, in the Gospels, God is almost exclusively called “Father” by Jesus, rather than by other people, and in Jesus’s references to the Father, there is evidence of a pattern which I called “The Gospel Pattern.” This pattern is seen in Jesus’s consistent choice of specific articles that preceded the title of *Father*. One key element in this pattern is that Jesus only refers to the Father as either “my” Father, or “your” Father, never “our” Father. This distinction in His use of the articles implies that there is a special relationship between Jesus and the Father that is different from believers’ relationship with the Father. Once again, the key takeaway, aside from the special relationship between Jesus and the Father, is that, given the Old Testament context, the first century audience would have understood Jesus’s use of “Father” to refer to YHWH. There would have been no other way in which this would have been understood, and Jesus Himself makes it clear, many times, that this is who He is talking about.

From here, the discussion moved on to the rest of the New Testament. While occurring less often than in the Gospels, the New Testament Epistles and Acts nevertheless use this title far more often than the entire Old Testament, once again pointing to a shift in how the Father was viewed in both Testaments. In these letters, it is much more common for other people, outside of Jesus, to call God “Father,” and Paul teaches that believers have now entered a special relationship with Him through Christ (Gal. 4:6). One aspect of the use of “Father” in the Epistles and Acts that did not change from the Gospels is the fact that it always (when speaking about God) refers to YHWH. Simply put, throughout the entirety of Scripture, the Father is understood to be YHWH, whereas Jesus is understood to be YHWH’s Son. There is simply no other way in which references to God, YHWH, or the Father would have been understood. This seems to also be the case in the writings of the early church fathers who unmistakably identified the Father as YHWH, and Jesus as the Son of YHWH. As such, the question that was asked at the beginning of this chapter, “Who is the Father?” was answered at the end of the chapter as, “The Father is YHWH.” Reading both the Old and New Testaments, as well as the writings of the early church fathers, there seems to be no other way to answer this question. Yet, this answer is still in need of further clarification, which is what the next chapter attempted to offer.

Before moving on to the next summary, a response to one possible objection to the conclusion of this chapter should be discussed. It is claimed, here, that the clearest identification of the Father, in the Bible, is with YHWH. However, it could be objected that this does not mean much because the Son is also identified with YHWH, both in the New Testament and in the writings of the early church fathers. It is not entirely clear, then, from this argument, that the Father is YHWH, and Jesus is the Son of YHWH, rather both are YHWH in some sense. While it is true that the Son is also identified with YHWH, this does not take away from the fact that

the Father is YHWH. The answer being provided here, then, remains true, but it does require further clarification, which is what the next chapter seeks to offer. This reality, that both the Father and the Son are identified as YHWH is precisely the issue that was at the center of trinitarian debates throughout the first four centuries, and continues to this day, although to a lesser extent. This gave rise to adoptionist views of the Trinity, for example, or views that claimed that the Father was fully YHWH, whereas the Son and the Spirit are YHWH in some derivative sense, or distinctions between nature, identity, and relationships (the Father and the Son are Father and Son in relation to one another, but are fully God in themselves), etc.

Whatever the explanation may be, and I believe that the explanation offered in this dissertation is the best one, the fact remains that, throughout Scripture and the writings of the early church fathers, the Father was most closely identified with YHWH, whereas Jesus was identified as the Son of YHWH. Yet, it is also true that Jesus was identified with YHWH, and as such the next chapter begins to outline how this can be the case. This is not a strong objection to the conclusion of this chapter, then, rather it is another reason for why more clarification is needed.

### Chapter 3

This chapter focused primarily on Richard Bauckham's notion of divine identity and attempted to show how this divine identity can help clarify the claim that the Father is YHWH. As was explained, Bauckham argues that second-temple Judaism's view of God was primarily centered, not on what God is, but on who God is.<sup>358</sup> In other words, the essence and nature of God are not the primary categories for Jewish theology, but rather it is identity. This identity, in

---

<sup>358</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Kindle Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), loc. 19.

second-temple Judaism, was reflected in what God did, specifically in His relation to Creation and Israel. Three major aspects of this identity are God as Creator, Sovereign Ruler, and Redeemer. Bauckham shows that there was a strict dichotomy between God and everything else, and while it was shown that this dichotomy may not have been as strict as Bauckham maintains, it was nevertheless present. Within this dichotomy, only God created the Universe, only God rules over Creation, and only God redeems His people. To take part in any of these actions is to be God, or a part of God, as seen in the so-called intermediary figures of second-temple literature.<sup>359</sup> After surveying and responding to various critiques of Bauckham's position, it was concluded that the notion of divine identity does, in fact, reflect at least one major way in which second-temple Jews viewed God, and that this is, therefore, part of the context for the New Testament.

This notion of divine identity is carried over to the New Testament, which is why it is so significant when Jesus is included in Creation (Jn. 1:3), is shown to forgive sins (Mk. 2:10), and claims to have all authority on heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). From here, the discussion moved to what I called the Pauline Pattern. In this pattern, Paul consistently speaks about the Father and the Son using the titles of "God" and "Lord," respectively. The only exception to this pattern is when Paul is citing Old Testament passages. In these cases, Paul uses the title of "Lord" for the Father, but even here this is not always the case. This pattern can be seen outside of Paul, as well, even in the writings of the early church fathers, although nowhere is it used as consistently as in the Pauline literature.

It was argued, in this chapter, that the Pauline Pattern arose out of a need to affirm the deity of Christ, while maintaining a distinction between the Father and the Son. That this is the

---

<sup>359</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?: The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 77, 84, 89.

case can be best seen when read through the context of divine identity explained, above. That Paul affirmed this notion of divine identity can also be seen in his reformulation of the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8:6. In this reformulation, Paul is affirming that both the Father and the Son are included in the divine identity of YHWH. In fact, this would be the only way to explain how Paul could affirm the deity of Christ, or identify Christ with YHWH, and yet continue to affirm a strict monotheism. For Paul, there was still only one God, even though both the Father and the Son are God, and both are distinct from one another. Furthermore, it was shown that, without this notion of divine identity and its relation to the Pauline Pattern, it would be nearly impossible to understand many of the writings of the early church fathers. As such, this seems the best way to understand both the writings of the New Testament, and the writings of the early church fathers, especially as they relate to the doctrine of the Trinity.

While not discussed there, the apologetic value of this argument can be seen when discussing one of the most common arguments against the Trinity. Time and again, I have seen so many non-Trinitarians, especially Jews and Muslims, point to the New Testament's distinction between "God" and "the Lord" to show that "the Lord" is not "God." Paul affirms that there is only one God (the Father), and one Lord (Jesus Christ). Therefore, according to many non-Trinitarians, it is clear, from Scripture, that Christ is not God. However, once the notion of divine identity is recognized, alongside the Pauline Pattern and Paul's reformulation of the Shema, it becomes clear that this is not what Paul is saying. To say that there is one God and one Lord is not to say that the Lord is not God, rather it is to say that both are included in the one identity of YHWH. This is classic Trinitarian theology in which the Father and the Son are distinct from one another, and yet are the one and the same God. Without this notion of divine identity, Christians would, and do, struggle to answer such a critique.



At the end of the chapter, it was concluded that the Father is YHWH in the sense that He is included in the divine identity. However, even this response was shown to not be enough, for it does not address another key aspect of trinitarian theology, especially during the first four centuries, namely God's nature. It was also argued that this response can possibly be misinterpreted as meaning that the Father is only a *part* of the divine identity, and as such He is not fully God. Trinitarian theology, however, maintains that all three Persons are fully God, in themselves, and not merely parts of God. As such, the next chapter would focus on God's nature, and how this nature relates to His identity.

#### Chapter Four

Although the notion of divine identity is the main interpretive lens through which second-temple Judaism viewed God, and as such serves as the theological background of the New Testament, it is also true that trinitarian debates throughout the first four centuries centered, not on God's identity, but on His nature. As such, any response to the question of the identity of the Father needs to account for God's nature. The first question that was asked in this chapter was whether God had a nature, at all. Alvin Plantinga offers a concise summary of the various responses to this question, pointing out that the central problem with God having a nature is how this allows for God's aseity and sovereignty.<sup>360</sup> One possible response to this would be to affirm God's nature, but to say that God is identical with His nature, per Augustine, Anslem, Aquinas, and others. Another possible response would be to deny that God has a nature because there are no natures to be had at all. The last possible response surveyed in this chapter is to deny God has

---

<sup>360</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 145-146.

a nature, “not because there are no properties but because he has no properties essentially.”<sup>361</sup> All three responses were deemed inadequate, and this section concluded by affirming that God has a nature, and that He is not identical with that nature.

From here, the discussion moved on to an analysis of what God’s nature consists of. It was shown that no exhaustive list of God’s properties can be offered, but that there are some properties that are generally agreed upon by philosophers and theologians, alike, that they are part of God’s essential properties. These properties include, at least, eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection. This incomplete list was arrived at primarily by affirming Anselm’s “Perfect Being” theology, which is most clearly seen in his ontological argument.<sup>362</sup> These attributes are also clearly affirmed throughout Scripture, some second-temple literature, and in the writings of the early church fathers. The most common view throughout these writings was that only God held these attributes, and as such any being that held these attributes was God. This line of reasoning was used by some early church fathers, such as Tertullian, to show, not only that the God of Israel was the true God, but that the gods of the pagans were false gods.<sup>363</sup> With this understanding of God’s nature in mind, the discussion went on to show that there are two sense in which the claim, “The Father is YHWH,” may be understood, corresponding to the “is” of identity and predication.

It was argued that to interpret the “is” in the statement, “The Father is YHWH,” as the “is” of identity is to make an identity statement. An identity statement was defined as the

---

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>362</sup> Anselm, *Monologion and Proslogion with the replies of Guanilo and Anselm* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 99.

<sup>363</sup> Tertullian, *The Soul’s Testimony*, translated by Rv. S. Thelwall, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ter tullian09.html>, ch. II.

equivalent of “is the same as,” or “is identical to.” As is explained by William Hasker, the problem here is with the transitive nature of identity.<sup>364</sup> If “The Father is YHWH” is an identity statement, then this entails that the Father is identical to YHWH. As such, if YHWH is triune, then this would lead to the inevitable, and problematic, conclusion that the Father is also triune. This conclusion does not reflect orthodox trinitarian doctrine, the teachings of Scripture about the Father, nor the writings of the early church fathers on this very topic. As such, this interpretation was rejected. The interpretation proposed in this chapter as the better one is to say that the “is” in the statement, “The Father is YHWH,” is the “is” of predication. If this is the case, then what “The Father is YHWH” means is essentially that the Father is God. In other words, there are certain essential attributes that YHWH possesses, and to say that the Father is YHWH is merely to say that the Father possesses these same attributes, and as such is the same God.

After showing that the divine name can, in fact, be used to refer to the divine attributes in the way proposed by the “is” of predication, the question then became, what about triunity? If triunity is one of the essential attributes of YHWH, then the “is” of predication does not really solve the matter, for it would mean that the Father, too, is triune. Therefore, it was proposed that it was better to place triunity under the category of identity, rather than that of nature. Seen in this way, the statement, “The Father is YHWH,” can be taken to mean that the Father possesses the divine attributes, while avoiding the mistaken conclusion that the Father is triune. It was shown that this interpretation not only better reflects orthodox trinitarian doctrine, but that it allows for further clarity in the multiple uses of the title of “God” and the divine name. When a faith statement says, for example, that God is triune, while at the same time affirming that Jesus

---

<sup>364</sup> William Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 59.

is the Son of God, we can now see that two senses of “God” are being used. The same can be said when we speak of the divine name. In one sense, it can refer to the triune God, but in another sense, it can refer to the divine attributes. It is in this latter sense that it can also be used of each of the Persons of the Trinity. In this way, we can affirm that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all YHWH, yet no one Person is triune, and all are distinct from one another.

One final problem arose in this discussion, namely, how to avoid tritheism. If three distinct Persons all possess the divine attributes, and therefore are all God, how do we avoid affirming three Gods? Historically, there have been many answers proposed to this dilemma, and all work to varying degrees. However, in this chapter I proposed viewing the doctrine of the Trinity through the interpretive lens of divine identity, as was defined in the previous chapter. If this notion of divine identity was a major part of the theological context within which the doctrine of the Trinity was formed, then it makes sense to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity through this lens. Part of what defines this notion of divine identity is this dichotomy between the divine and everything else. On the divine side, there is God; on the other side, there is everything else that has been created by God. The divine side is expressed primarily through Creation, Sovereignty, and Redemption. In other words, only God created the Universe, only He is the sovereign Ruler of the Universe (and everything that exists), and only He has the power to redeem His people.

When the New Testament includes Jesus in these exclusively divine actions, it is clearly affirming His place on the divine side of reality. In other words, Jesus is being called God, but not just *a* God, rather He is the *only* God, YHWH, for only YHWH possesses these attributes, and this identity. Paul’s reformulation of the Shema is an example of how the New Testament authors used the notion of divine identity to include Jesus in the identity of YHWH, while

continuing to affirm a strict monotheism. Within this divine identity, it is simply not possible for any other being, thing, or person, to possess the divine attributes, or to take part in the divine identity (creating, ruling, or redeeming), other than YHWH. As such, to possess the divine attributes, for the authors of the New Testament, is to be included in the divine identity. It was argued that this is similar to Anselm's "Perfect Being" theology in which God is the greatest conceivable Being, and as such, there can be only one. In the same way, only YHWH possess the divine attributes and divine identity. As such, there can be only one YHWH.

To say that the Father (or the Son and the Holy Spirit) possesses the divine attributes, for the writers of the New Testament would never have entailed two or more Gods. Rather, they would have understood this through the lens of divine identity, and as such would have interpreted it as saying that the Father shares this divine identity, or is included in it. Simply put, then, the notion of divine identity does not allow for multiple Gods, but does allow for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to share this one identity. This interpretation leads to the conclusion that there is only one God, YHWH, whose identity is triune, and as such the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are included in that identity. As can be seen, this conclusion does not say anything different from orthodox trinitarian statements, such as the classic "One Being, Three Persons" formula that many of the church fathers affirmed but does offer a bit more clarity than such statements.

One final objection that may be brought up would be to say that these notions of the "is" of identity and predication would have been completely unknown to the biblical authors, and to the early church fathers. As such, this is a new teaching that should be rejected. However, I believe I have been successful in showing that, while the concept itself was unknown until relatively recent, this concept does reflect and harmonize with the biblical teachings. Second-

temple Judaism might not have called their view “divine identity,” but the notion of divine identity does, in fact, reflect how they viewed God. Similarly, the early church fathers might not have called their trinitarian formulations the “is” of predication, but it seems clear that they meant something of this nature. Otherwise, their statements would be very problematic and difficult to understand, as has been shown, here.

Furthermore, it is not being argued, here, that this interpretation is *the* correct interpretation, as though it were divinely inspired, itself. Nor is it being argued that we now must reinterpret all trinitarian theology through this lens. All that is being argued, here, is that this notion of divine identity, alongside the “is” of predication, can offer clarity to what we already believe about the Trinity. It is not a new belief, but only a clearer way of understanding our traditional belief. The author of Genesis 1:26 would have never understood his words to imply that God was triune. Yet, most Christians can agree that this is at least one possible interpretation of that passage, in light of what we now know God to be (triune), and this interpretation can bring some clarity to that passage that was missing, before. In much the same way, I am not claiming that the biblical authors had this notion of divine identity or “is” of predication in mind when they wrote the Bible (or, at least, not explicitly). However, this is at least one way in which the Bible can be understood, without distorting it or threatening sound doctrine; one that offers some much-needed clarity. At the very least, we can use the conclusions being proposed, here, to bring some clarity to how we speak about God, which is incredibly necessary if we are to avoid the charge of incoherence or contradiction.

### **Conclusion and Further Study**

This entire dissertation began with the question, “Who is the Father?” Throughout these chapters, it has been answered as, “The Father is YHWH in the sense that He possesses the

divine attributes and is included in the divine identity.” This answer does not seem to be anything new, in itself, but by interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity through the lens of divine identity and being careful to distinguish the different uses of the title of “God,” and applying the “is” of predication to major trinitarian claims such as “The Father is YHWH,” we can continue to affirm orthodox trinitarian theology, while avoiding certain pitfalls. However, more study needs to be done on this notion of divine identity, the Pauline Pattern, and the categorization of triunity under God’s identity, rather than His nature. It would be helpful thoroughly go through Scripture, noting every single instance in which God is described in some way, seeing if these descriptions do, in fact, reflect the two major categories of divine identity, namely, God’s relation to Israel and to the rest of Creation. Key passages show that this seems to be the case, but it would be helpful to have a more precise percentage of the number of passages that fall into this notion of divine identity, and those that do not. If it could be shown that the vast majority do reflect the notion of divine identity, then this interpretive lens can be affirmed even stronger.

Similarly, while the Pauline Pattern is unquestionably present in the Pauline literature, it would be helpful to show how this pattern can be used to interpret the writings of at least the early church fathers. I have affirmed, here, that this is the case, and that if it were not the case, many of these writings would be difficult to understand. I stand by this claim, but it would be helpful to have a much larger sample of the writings of the early church fathers than that which I showed, here, and attempt to interpret these writings through the lens of the Pauline Pattern, to see how well it works. Lastly, while I have centered my discussion primarily on the epistemological side of the doctrine of the Trinity, it would be helpful to see just how well this notion of divine identity, and the “is” of predication can be in explaining the ontological side of the discussion.

It makes sense, to me, to speak about the Father using certain predications, specifically the divine attributes. It also makes sense, to me, to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity through the lens of divine identity. Ultimately, however, these are primarily semantic, and only offer clarity to how we speak about the Trinity. How, exactly, can three Persons share the same divine attributes, without being three Gods is one of the most significant issues in trinitarian discussions. I believe that the notions discussed, here, can offer some clarity to those discussions, but they need to go beyond words and concepts. As such, further study on the ontology of the Trinity would be very helpful, especially if the epistemological aspects described, here, can be applied.

With all of that in mind, I believe I have succeeded in defending my main thesis, namely that applying the distinction between the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication to the doctrine of the Trinity can help clarify the identity of the Father, in relation to YHWH, and resolve any possible contradiction of identities. As noted, above, this all began with a question. Throughout my research, I have been able to answer that question in a way that I, at least, find satisfactory. While there is still much to understand, and indeed we will never understand it all, I hope that this dissertation adds something new to the discussion that can help bring a bit more clarity to the doctrine of the Trinity.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength  
and with all your mind.” (Luke 10:27)



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anselm. *Monologion and Proslogion with the replies of Guanilo and Anselm*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1947.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 13-21*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
- Arnold, Bill T. and Bryan E. Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Baggett, David and Jerry L. Walls. *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Barrett, Matthew and Ardel B. Caneday, eds. *Four Views on the Historical Adam*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics 1.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*. NY: T&T Clark International, 2004.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Kindle Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.
- Blyth, Dougal. "Aristotle's God in Metaphysics 12.7." *Classical Philology*, vol. 112, no. 2 (2017).
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Carasik, Michael, ed. *Deuteronomy: The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedelot*. Phi: Jewish Publication Society, 2015.
- Clement of Rome. *First Epistle*. [www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-roberts.html](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-roberts.html).
- Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.
- Coffman, R. Aryeh. *Las Enseñanzas del Talmud En Yaacob: Berajot I*. Mexico: Editorial Jerusalem de México, 2009.
- Comentario Bíblico de Matthew Henry. España: Editorial CLIE, 1999.
- Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

- Craig, William Lane. "Jesus and Pagan Mythology." (Jan. 2009).  
<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/jesus-and-pagan-mythology>.
- Daams, Nico. "Translating YHWH 'Elohim.'" *Bible Translator*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2011).
- Daley, Brian E., and S. J., eds. *The Early Church Fathers: Gregory of Nazianzus*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?: The New Testament Evidence*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.
- Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Epistle of Barnabas*. <https://ccel.org/ccel/barnabas/epistle>. Last accessed September 5, 2022.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Gadenz, Pablo T. *The Gospel of Luke: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.
- García, Sandra and Fernando Cruz, eds. *Declaración de Fe y Orden de la Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico*. Puerto Rico: Iglesia Evangélica de Puerto Rico, 1999.
- Garland, David E. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical Theological Exposition of the Holy Scripture; 2 Corinthians*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.
- González, Justo L. *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*, Vol. I. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970.
- Goodrick, Edward W. and John R. Kohlenberger III. *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.
- Gregory of Nazianzus. *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*. NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Oration 38: On the Theophany." *The Early Church Fathers: Gregory of Nazianzus*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Groothuis, Douglas. *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011.
- Guthrie, George H. *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.

- Hasker, William. *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*. UK: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Hays, J. Daniel. "1-2 Samuel." *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013.
- Healy, Curtis. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Healy, Mary and Peter Williamson. *The Gospel of Mark: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Ignatius. *Epistles of Ignatius*. [https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius\\_antioch/epistles\\_of\\_ignatius](https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius_antioch/epistles_of_ignatius). Last accessed September 5, 2022.
- Keener, Craig S. *1-2 Corinthians: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004.
- Kirsopp, Lake, translator, *The Didache*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1912.
- La Torá con Rashí: Éxodo*. Mexico: Editorial Jerusalem de México, 2002.
- La Torá con Rashí: Génesis*. Mexico: Editorial Jerusalem de México, 2001.
- Lewis, C. S. *Christian Reflections*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967.
- Martyrdom of Polycarp*. [https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/martyrdom\\_of\\_polycarp](https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/martyrdom_of_polycarp).
- Merriam-Webster*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>. Last Accessed March 14, 2022.
- McBrien, Richard P. *Catholicism*. New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1994.
- McClellan, Daniel. "Cognitive Perspectives on Early Christology." *Biblical Interpretation*. UK: Brill, 2017.
- McGrath, James F. *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in its Jewish Context*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009.
- Moo, Douglas J. *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.
- Moreland, J. P. & William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003.

Origen. *On First Principles*. Fig, 2012.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Does God Have a Nature?*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.

Polycarp of Smyrna. *Epistle to the Philippians*.

[https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/epistle\\_to\\_the\\_philippians](https://ccel.org/ccel/polycarp/epistle_to_the_philippians). Last accessed September 5, 2022.

Quasten, Johannes. *Patrology*: Volume I. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1949.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Patrology*, vol. II. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1952.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Patrology*, Vol. IV. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1986.

Saint Augustine. *The Trinity*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Tractate CXXI." *Sermons or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John*. 1888.

Segal, Alan F. *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012.

Seeskin, Kenneth. "The God of the Philosophers." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* (2006).

Senor, Thomas D. "The Incarnation and the Trinity." *Reason for the Hope Within*. William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, USA, 2018.

Soloveitchik, Elijah Zvi. *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament: Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik's Commentary to the Gospels*. Phi: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

Soulen, R. Kendall. "YHWH the Triune God." *Modern Theology*, 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1999). ISSN 0266-7177.

Staples, Jason A. "Lord, Lord: Jesus as YHWH in Matthew and Luke." *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 63, no. 1. Jan. 2018.

St. Basil of Caesarea. "Against Eunomius." *The Fathers of the Church*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011.

\_\_\_\_\_. *On the Holy Spirit*. Digireads.com Publishing, 2020.

- Steinmann, Andrew E. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.
- Stek, John H. and Wilber B. Wallis. *The NIV Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995.
- St. Irenaeus of Lyons. *Against Heresies*. Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012.
- Taylor, Mark. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture; 1 Corinthians*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- Tertullian. "To the Nations." *Early Church Theology*. Fig, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Against Praxeas*. Fig, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Soul's Testimony*. Translated by Rev. S. Thelwall.  
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian09.html>.
- The Apostles' Creed*, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed>.
- The Complete Apocrypha*. Covenant Press, 2018.
- The Britannica Dictionary*. <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary>. Last Accessed March 14, 2022.
- The Westminster Confession of Faith*. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith>. May 12, 2021.
- Torrance, Thomas F. *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*. London, UK: T&T Clark, 2018.
- Towns, Elmer L. *Theology for Today*. Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008.
- Van Bekkum, Wout Jac. "What's in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition." *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*. The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV: 2006.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.
- Vos, Howard F. *Genesis: Everyday Bible Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1982.
- Wainwright, Arthur W. *The Trinity in the New Testament*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.

Wenham, Gordon. *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Wierenga, Edward. "Trinity and Polytheism." *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of the Christian Philosophers*. July 2004.