

**AN EXPOSITION AND CRITIQUE OF
KARL RAHNER'S AXIOM:
"The Economic Trinity *is* the Immanent Trinity
and Vice Versa"¹**

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I. Introduction

THE WIDELY ACCEPTED² *Grundaxiom* of Karl Rahner's doctrine of the Trinity, viz., "The economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa,"³ functions in contemporary theology as a means of

¹In the following, DH = *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lebrentscheidungen* (Heinrich Denzinger, ed.; Peter Hünermann, rev.; Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1991³⁷); MS = *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik* 1-5 (Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer, ed.; Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965-81); *SmtWk* = Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke* (Karl Lehmann, Johannes B. Metz, Karl-Heinz Neufeld, Albert Raffelt, and Herbert Vorgrimler, ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1995-); *STh* = *Summa Theologiae (editio Leonina)*: Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1948-50); *SzTh* = Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* 1-16 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954-84); and *TI* = Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 1-23 (Cornelius Ernst et al, tr.; London: DLT, 1961-92).

²The *Grundaxiom*, writes John O'Donnell, "is accepted by practically all contemporary theologians" ("Trinité. II. Développement dans la tradition. 5. La Trinité économique est la Trinité immanente," *DSAM* 15 [Paris: Beauchesne, 1991], 1311).

³"Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam" ["Oneness and Threefoldness"], *TI* xviii, 105-21 at 114; "Einzigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit im Gespräch mit dem Islam" ["Einzigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit"], *SzTh* xiii, 129-47 at 139. "We are all aware," writes Catherine M. LaCugna, "that 'economic Trinity' is the theological term given to the salvific acts of God *ad extra*, and 'immanent Trinity' refers to

reconciling the seemingly contradictory claims: (a) that God has revealed the doctrine of the Trinity to the church; and (b) that he has not disclosed this doctrine verbally in Scripture. Rahner, by his *Grundaxiom*, that is to say, asserts that human beings can: (1) discern a Trinitarian pattern in God's action *ad extra*; (2) legitimately infer from this that a Trinitarian pattern of precisely the same sort characterizes God's inner being; and (3) thereby discover God's triune character even if God does not disclose this through a verbal revelation.

Rahner's axiom, along with the arguments he and others employ on its behalf, has, in fact, led not a few persons to believe that one can reasonably believe in and theorize about the doctrine of the Trinity even if one rejects the doctrine of the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture. In this article, we shall seek to expose this belief as a misconception by: (a) refuting Rahner's principal arguments to the effect that "the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa;" and (b) demonstrating, on the basis of Scriptural premises alone, that a purely salvation-historical revelation of the Trinity, of the sort that Rahner's *Grundaxiom* presupposes, is impossible.

II. Refutation of Rahner's Arguments

1. *Preliminary clarification.* Before proceeding to these tasks, however, it behooves us to clarify what Rahner's *Grundaxiom* means. To do so more precisely, we shall first eliminate four, possible misconstruals.

a. *Trivially obvious identity.* First and above all else, Rahner does not posit his *Grundaxiom* in order to affirm a trivially obvious identity of the Trinity with itself. In the words of Philip Cary:

Rahner must be claiming more than just the identity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of salvation-history with the three persons of the immanent Trinity; for that is an identity already written into the Creed, which no Trinitarian theology could possibly want to contest. . . . The distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity has never implied that there were two separate Trinities, but only that

distinctions of relation within God's own being" ("Re-conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation," *SJTb* 38 [1984], 1-23 at 10).

there is a difference between describing God *in se* and describing the work of God in the economy of salvation.⁴

b. Absolute identity. Second, Rahner also does not intend for his *Grundaxiom* to affirm an identity so absolute that it renders the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity superfluous. “The ‘immanent’ Trinity,” Rahner’s writes, “is the necessary condition of the possibility of God’s free self-communication”:⁵ not that self-communication *simpliciter*.

c. Copy theory. Nor does Rahner, third, regard the economic Trinity as a mere manifestation of the immanent Trinity through the divine acts of salvation history. God’s “threefold, gratuitous, and free relation to us,” in Rahner’s view, “is not merely a copy or an analogy of the inner Trinity.”⁶ Rahner characterizes the economic Trinity much more as the self-gift of the immanent Trinity to humanity. “God has given himself so fully in his absolute self-communication to the creature,” he writes, “that the ‘immanent’ Trinity becomes the Trinity of the ‘economy of salvation.’”⁷ Again, “because God himself and not some created representation of God is involved in the free self-gift of God as mystery, the three-fold form belongs directly to God in his relation to man. Thus the economic Trinity of salvation is ipso facto the immanent Trinity.”⁸

⁴“On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: A Critique of Rahner on the Trinity,” *Thomist* 56 (1992), 365-405 at 367.

⁵*The Trinity* (Joseph Donceel, tr.; New York: Herder, 1970), 102, n. 21; “Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte” [“Der dreifaltige Gott”] in *MS* ii, 317-401 at 384, Anm. 21. As Joseph Wong explains, “If the economic Trinity simply *is* the immanent Trinity, then Rahner’s repeated assertion that the immanent self-expression of God [the intra-Trinitarian processions] is the *presupposed condition* for the free self-utterance *ad extra* [the economy of salvation] would lose its meaning” (*Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* [BSRel 61; Rome: LAS, 1984], 211).

⁶*Trinity*, 35; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 337.

⁷“The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology” [“Mystery”], *TI* iv, 36-73 at 69; “Über den Begriff des Geheimnisses in der katholischen Theologie” [“Geheimnis”], *SzTh* iv, 51-99 at 95.

⁸“The Hiddenness of God,” *TI* xvi, 227-43 at 240; “Über die Verborgenheit Gottes,” *SzTh* xii, 285-305 at 301.

The economic Trinity, then, does not, in Rahner's view, correspond to the immanent Trinity as, for instance, a picture corresponds to the reality it portrays. It corresponds to the immanent Trinity, rather, as a person who spends himself for the good of another corresponds to himself as he would exist whether or not he undertook this labor. The economic Trinity, as Rahner understands it, *is* the immanent Trinity pouring itself out in grace.

d. Merely de facto identity. Rahner, fourth and finally, does not consider this correspondence between the eternal Trinity and the Trinity which communicates itself to humanity as merely *de facto* and unnecessary in itself. Although Rahner allows for and, indeed, insists upon some change in God's being when he communicates himself to others, he nonetheless regards God's triune, internal relatedness as a principle of divine identity which necessarily perdures even through the process of divine self-communication. Rahner denies the possibility, therefore, of a self-communication of God whose internal distinctions differ in any way from those of the immanent Trinity. In his words, "if . . . there is a real *self*-communication with a real distinction in that which is communicated as such, hence with a real distinction 'for us,' then God must 'in himself' carry this distinction."⁹

e. Rahner's actual meaning. By the statement, "the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity, and vice versa,"¹⁰ then, Rahner does mean that divine self-communication "can, *if* occurring in freedom, occur only in the intra-divine manner of the two communications of the one divine essence by the Father to the Son and the Spirit."¹¹ In other words, the immanent constitution of the Trinity forms a kind of *a priori* law for the divine self-communication *ad extra* such that the structure of the latter cannot but correspond to the structure of the former.¹²

⁹*Trinity*, 36, n. 34; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 338, Anm. 34.

¹⁰"Oneness and Threefoldness," *TI* xviii, 114; "Einzigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit," *S&Th* xiii, 139.

¹¹*Trinity*, 36; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 338.

¹²"The Trinity as present in the economy of salvation," Rahner writes, "necessarily embodies also the Trinity as immanent" ("Reflections on Methodology in Theology," *TI* xi, 68-114 at 108; "Überlegungen zur Methode der Theologie," *S&Th* ix, 79-126 at 120.

2. Rahner's arguments for the *Grundaxiom*.

a. *Introduction*. That such a correspondence must obtain, however, is by no means self-evident. Rahner, after all, famously admits that “he who is not subject to change himself can *himself* be subject to change *in something else*.”¹³ If God could alter other facets of his being in something else, it seems, *prima facie*, that he could also alter the relations between his modes of subsistence.¹⁴ God's simplicity,¹⁵ as classically understood, moreover, would seem to dictate

¹³*Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* [Foundations] (William V. Dych, tr.; New York: Crossroad, 1978), 220; *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* [Grundkurs] in *SmtWk* xxvi, 3-442 at 212. Rahner's commentators have reached little consensus as to what Rahner means when he writes that God “is not subject to change himself.” They agree overwhelmingly, however, that Rahner ascribes a radical mutability to God insofar as he communicates himself to the world. Cf., for instance, Wong, *Logos-Symbol*, 154-7, 181-4, 198-9, 244-8; Klaus Fischer, *Der Mensch als Gebeimnis: Die Anthropologie Karl Rabners* (ÖF.S 5; Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 348-52; Michael Schulz, *Sein und Trinität: Systematische Erörterungen zur Religionsphilosophie G. W. F. Hegels im ontologischeschichtlichen Rückblick auf J. Duns Scotus und I. Kant und die Hegel-Rezeption in der Seinsauslegung und Trinitätstheologie bei W. Pannenberg, E. Jüngel, K. Rahner und H. U. v. Balthasar* (MThS.S 53; St. Ottilien: EOS, 1997), 655-62; Heinrich Springhorn, *Immanenz Gottes und Transzendenz der Welt: Eine Analyse zur systematischen Theologie von Karl Rahner und Wolfhart Pannenberg* (THEOS—Studienreihe Theologische Forschungsergebnisse 48; Hamburg: Dr. Kovač, 2001), 104-7; and Richard Brosse, *Jésus, L'Histoire de Dieu: Historicité et devenir: deux notions clés de la théologie de Karl Rahner* (SF NS 82; Fribourg, Suisse: Éditions Universitaires, 1996), 233-8.

¹⁴Rahner explicitly affirms the objective identity of each divine person with the divine essence (*Trinity*, 72-3; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 364). When he speaks of the Trinitarian persons as “modes of subsistence,” accordingly, he means to refer to the persons *qua* distinct, i.e., according to their personal properties, and not to reduce the persons to those properties (cf. *ibid.*, 74, n. 27, 109-10; *ebd.*, 365, Anm. 26, 389). Rahner explicitly states, moreover, that the Trinitarian persons are really (i.e., in fact and not merely in conception), eternally, and necessarily distinct (“Dreifaltigkeit,” *SmtWk* xvii/i, 535-8 at 536-7). One cannot, therefore, reasonably consider him a Sabellian, or “modalist.”

¹⁵Rahner endorses the doctrine of divine simplicity (cf. *Trinity*, 69, 102, n. 21; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 362, 384, Anm. 21), but interprets it in an unconventional sense (cf. *ibid.*, 103; *ebd.*, 384).

that changes in other facets of God's being could not leave the Trinitarian relations untouched. For, if God is simple, i.e., absolutely uncomposed, then every aspect of his being is essentially, though not necessarily relatively, identical with every other; hence the slightest change in any aspect of a simple God would transform every aspect of that God. It seems, then, that the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could hardly escape the comprehensive metamorphosis entailed by divine becoming. Such becoming, however, forms an indispensable prerequisite to divine self-communication as Rahner conceives of it: i.e., "the act whereby God goes out of himself into 'the other' in such a way that he bestows himself upon the other by becoming the other."¹⁶

b. The argument from divine self-communication. Rahner contends, nevertheless, in his only explicit argument for the *Grundaxiom*, that precisely because God communicates himself, the relations intrinsic to that communication necessarily correspond to the eternal relations within the immanent Trinity. "The differentiation of the self-communication of God . . . must," he writes, "belong to God 'in himself, or otherwise this difference . . . would do away with God's self-communication."¹⁷ Rahner, indeed, seems to regard asymmetry between God's eternal relations and his communicated relations as self-evidently incompatible with a genuine, divine self-communication and, accordingly, never responds explicitly to the difficulty raised above about the implications of change in a simple being.

To his credit, however, Rahner does display awareness of a related objection to his position: viz., that even if he could identify an authentically Trinitarian superstructure of religious experience, and even if he could plausibly argue that this superstructure characterizes the God who communicates himself to human beings, Rahner could not, it seems, establish that the structure in question (1) characterized this God even before he communicated himself, and (2) would have characterized him even if he had never communicated himself. In the following passage, for instance, one

¹⁶"Mystery," *TI* iv, 68; "Geheimnis," *SzTh* iv, 93.

¹⁷*Trinity*, 99-100; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 382. Cf. *Foundations*, 137; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 135-6; and "The Mystery of the Trinity" ["Mystery of Trinity"], *TI* xvi, 255-9 at 258; "Um das Geheimnis der Dreifaltigkeit" ["Geheimnis der Dreifaltigkeit"], *SzTh* xii, 320-25 at 323.

can discern a preliminary response to the criticism that, if God is not immutable, his inner structure after he communicates himself need not mirror his structure before, or prescinding from, this communication. “The Lo,goj evndia,qetoj,” he writes:

is the condition of the possibility of the Lo,goj proforiko,j. This does not make of the Logos a mere principle of creation. For if the *verbum prolativum* . . . is uttered *freely, thus* having its condition in the Father’s immanent Word, it must have an “immanent” sense and a meaning for the Father himself. Otherwise the Father’s self-expression *ad extra* would either no longer be a free grace, or no “immanent” word could pre-exist in relation to it as the condition of its possibility.¹⁸

Rahner recognizes, in other words, that one could reasonably conceive of the Logos as “a mere principle of creation” under one, or possibly both, of two conditions. The Logos could constitute a mere principle of creation if: (a) the self-communication involved in creation was not a free grace; or (b) the Logos did not exist prior to creation. It is the second possibility that interests us here.

By raising the possibility that God first differentiates himself into Father and Logos when he wishes to communicate himself *ad extra*, Rahner displays his awareness that a differentiation within a mutable God’s communication of himself need not imply a differentiation within this God prior to, or irrespective of, the communication. He acknowledges, in fact, that “here lies the critical point of the whole question. Why is the Son as the word of the free self-expression of the Father to the world necessarily also the Lo,goj evndia,qetoj of the Father? Why does the possibility of the Father’s self-expression to the world, even as a mere possibility, already imply an inner ‘differentiation’ in God himself?”¹⁹

Rahner seems, then, clearly to understand the problem: if God can change in communicating himself, why should one assume that the communicated God corresponds to God as he existed before, or as he would have existed without, the communication? He attempts, moreover, to supply a rudimentary answer, which, due to the importance of the matter at hand, we quote at length:

First, we may simply point out that the experience of the absolute proximity of the God who communicates himself in Christ is already

¹⁸*Trinity*, 64; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 358-9.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 64-5; *ebd.*, 359.

interpreted in this way by the theology of the New Testament. This theology knows already of a descent Christology [*Deszendenzchristologie*] as an interpretation of an ascent Christology [*Aszendenzchristologie*] in the Synoptics and in the discourses of the Acts of the Apostles. But *how* and *why* did such an interpretation arise—a “theology” developed within the very framework of the history of revelation? Taking a leaf from this biblical interpretation itself we may say: Jesus knew of himself in a peculiar way as the “Son” *as well* with respect to the Father *as also* with respect to men. But this would be impossible if he were simply the Father making himself present and giving himself in a human reality. Let us suppose that . . . we should, in some kind of Sabellian way, allow the human reality to subsist hypostatically in the Father. In that case we could still in this humanity conceive of a spiritual, free, created subjectivity which might also refer to the Father in adoration, obedience, and so on. . . . It might call this origin in which it subsists “Father.” But as the concrete presence of the Father it could not with respect to *man* experience and express itself as the *Son* of the Father.²⁰

These remarks, which Rahner himself characterizes as “brief and stammering words,”²¹ do, of course, contain significant moments of truth. The central claim of the first half of Rahner’s statement, nonetheless, seems partially gratuitous; and the central claim of the second half seems largely, albeit not entirely, immaterial.

The gratuitous aspect of the first half, naturally, does not consist in Rahner’s acknowledgment of a robust descent Christology in the New Testament, especially in the Johannine literature and the epistles of Paul. The gratuitous aspect of Rahner’s statement lies rather in the undefended assumption that this descent Christology constitutes “an interpretation of an ascent Christology . . . in the Synoptics and in the discourses of the Acts of the Apostles.” For, first, the New Testament writers themselves do not claim that they reached their descent Christology by drawing conclusions from earlier, more modest claims. On the whole, rather, they either: (a) ascribe their Christology to Jesus’ words delivered on earth (Matt. 28:19; John 3:13; 8:23, 42, 58; 10:30; 12:45; 14:9; 16:15; 17:5, etc.) and from heaven (Gal. 1:11-12; Rev. 1:8, 11, 17; 22:13, etc.); or (b) simply give no account of their Christology’s origins.

²⁰Ibid., 65; ebd..

²¹Ibid.; ebd..

If Rahner wishes to assert that the New Testament writers inferred the pre-existence of Jesus as a distinct divine person from some source other than verbal testimony, then, he should explain how this could have occurred. In the passage quoted above, however, which represents Rahner's principal effort to meet this challenge, Rahner explains, on the basis of Christ's filial consciousness, not how Jesus' followers could have recognized him as the pre-existent Son of God, but how they could have recognized him as the Son of God *after* the decisive event of divine self-communication.

That, however, is not at all to the point. For the question at hand is not how the disciples could have recognized Jesus as the intra-divine Logos, but rather how the disciples could have known, without simply being told, that the God who, according to Rahner, can and even must metamorphose when communicating himself, must have possessed a Logos prior to this self-communication. Rahner seems, then, not to substantiate his claim that Christ's disciples did, or even could have, inferred the eternal pre-existence of the Logos from their experience of Jesus and his resurrection without explicit, divinely authenticated, verbal testimony; and Rahner does not explain how the early community could have discovered the pre-existence and personality of the Holy Spirit.

It seems doubtful, moreover, that Rahner could explain how the disciples could reasonably have inferred these doctrines from their experience. What experience, short of the beatific vision, would suffice to justify, of itself, an inference to such subtle conclusions? What reason, short of a verbal revelation, furthermore, could suffice to prove the following: that a mutable God could not alter the structure of the intra-divine relations when he communicates himself in such a way as to render it impossible for human beings to infer the relational structure of his inner being before he communicated himself from the structure he exhibits in the communication? Rahner seems to supply insufficient evidence for this last proposition, which is equivalent to the *Grundaxiom*; and, if one disallows a verbal revelation, it is difficult to imagine in what such evidence might consist. Rahner's argument for the *Grundaxiom* from divine self-communication, therefore, seems to face practically insuperable objections.

c. The argument from the non-occurrence of verbal revelation. Although Rahner explicitly proposes only one full-fledged argument for the

Grundaxiom, viz., that from self-communication, a second, implicit argument seems to underlie that from divine self-communication and to account, in large measure, both for Rahner's vigorous advocacy of the *Grundaxiom* and for the theological public's enthusiastic embrace of it. The pith of this argument seems to appear in the following sentence from Rahner's tractate on the Trinity in *Mysterium Salutis*. "For him who rejects our basic thesis," Rahner writes, "the Trinity can *only* be something which, as long as we do not contemplate it immediately in its absolute 'in itself', can be told about in purely conceptual statements, in a merely *verbal* revelation, as opposed to God's *salvific activity* in us."²²

In other words, if we understand the thrust of Rahner's thought correctly, Rahner thinks along the following lines: if (a) verbal revelation never occurs;²³ and (b) the church, nonetheless, knows the doctrine of the Trinity to be true; then (c) the church must possess the capacity to prove this doctrine true without appealing to a verbal revelation. If, moreover (d) the economy of salvation constitutes the only possible source of knowledge about the Trinity besides a verbal revelation; then it seems (e) that the economy of salvation, by itself, must supply all the data necessary for a valid inference to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Since the economy of salvation could supply sufficient data, apart from a verbal revelation, for a valid inference to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity only if: (f) the Trinitarian relations that appear, or seem to appear, in the economy necessarily correspond to those of the immanent Trinity; and (g) human beings can ascertain this

²²Ibid., 39; ebd., 340.

²³In Rahner's view, in fact, God never intervenes in the categorical order. In his words: "A special 'intervention' of God . . . can only be understood as the historical concreteness of the transcendental self-communication of God which is always already [*immer schon*] intrinsic to the concrete world: . . . the becoming historical and concrete of that 'intervention' in which God as the transcendental ground of the world has from the outset embedded himself in this world as its self-communicating ground" (*Foundations*, 87; *Grundkurs, SmtWk* xxvi, 87-8). In Rahner's view, accordingly, "one can without hesitation view the material contents of historical revelation as verbalized objectifications of the 'revelation' which is already present in the gratuitous radicalizing of human transcendental in God's self-communication" ("The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith," *TI* xxi, 151-61 at 158; "Glaubensakt und Glaubensinhalt," *SzTh* xv, 152-62 at 158).

correspondence and its necessity with certainty in the absence of a verbal revelation; then (h) Rahner's *Grundaxiom* must be not only true, but also recognizable as such by human reasoning. On such grounds as these, presumably, Rahner accepts the *Grundaxiom* as virtually self-evident in spite of difficulties such as those addressed in the previous subsection.

d. Conclusion. Rahner seeks to warrant the *Grundaxiom*, in sum, with two, principal arguments: the first of which, that from divine self-communication, is both invalid and unsound,²⁴ and the second of which, that from the putative non-occurrence of verbal revelation, is definitely unsound. One can safely conclude, therefore, that Rahner does not successfully warrant his axiom.

III. The Impossibility of a Purely Salvation-Historical Revelation of the Trinity

1. Introduction. By refuting Rahner's arguments for his *Grundaxiom*, of course, we have by no means disproved the *Grundaxiom* itself. In order to accomplish this more ambitious task, we shall seek to prove an alternative axiom: "In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes."²⁵ This axiom, at least as ordinarily understood, implies: (a) that the divine persons possess, as peculiar to themselves, only their reference to each other and the properties that follow immediately therefrom; (b) that they can act, accordingly, only through God's essential omnipotence, which is equally identical with each of the three; (c) that all divine acts *ad extra* may, consequently, be ascribed with equal right to any of the divine persons; and (d) that one may not, therefore, legitimately infer the tripersonality of God from a salvation history that may appear to manifest the activity of three divine agencies.

If this axiom is correct, then, the divine acts *ad extra* are utterly and completely undifferentiated, and an economic Trinity, i.e., a manifestation of the intra-Trinitarian distinctions through the acts

²⁴"An argument is VALID," write Colin Allen and Michael Hand, "if and only if it is necessary that *if* all its premises are true, its conclusions are true. . . . An argument is SOUND if and only if it is valid and all its premises are true" (*Logic Primer* [Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001²], 1-2).

²⁵DH 1330.

of salvation history, exists only to the extent that God appropriates²⁶ divine acts to particular divine persons in Scripture. The axiom in question implies, that is to say, that no economic Trinity whatsoever would exist without verbal revelation and that the economic Trinity as Rahner understands it, i.e., a threefold pattern in the divine acts themselves, does not and cannot exist.

If the axiom, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes,” is correct, then: (a) the economic Trinity, in the sense in which Rahner employs the term, is not trine; (b) it is, consequently, radically distinct from the immanent Trinity; and (c) Rahner’s *Grundaxiom*, therefore, at least in the sense in which he understands it, is radically false.

2. *Premises of Our Argument.* In the following, accordingly, we shall attempt to disprove Rahner’s *Grundaxiom* by deriving the opposed axiom, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes,”²⁷ from the biblical doctrines of divine simplicity, the transitivity of identity, the eternal generation of the Son, and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ Before establishing the connection between these doctrines and the axiom in question, however, it seems appropriate to demonstrate that these doctrines themselves possess an adequate, biblical foundation.

a. *Divine simplicity.* One can deduce the doctrine of divine simplicity most readily, it seems, from two more immediately biblical doctrines: first, that God “created all things” (Rev. 4:11; cf. Eph. 3:9; John 1:3 and Col. 1:16); and, second, that he who creates some perfection must possess that perfection antecedently in himself. This principle seems to constitute the suppressed major

²⁶“Appropriation” is a technical term for the ascription of essential, divine attributes or works to an individual, divine person in order to manifest that person’s distinctive properties.

²⁷DH 1330.

²⁸We shall presuppose in the arguments below the doctrine of Scripture’s plenary, verbal inspiration and the doctrine of the Trinity in its most elementary form: sc., the doctrine that “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each individual of these is God, and at the same time all are one God. . . . The Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit; [and] the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son” (Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 1.5.5; CCL 32, 9).

premise of the following enthymeme (Psa. 94:9; cf. Exod. 4:11): “He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?”

The second doctrine supplies an adequate basis for the following argument in *modus tollens*:²⁹

1. If any perfection of God is a creature of God, then a creature of God is possessed by God antecedently to its creation;
2. But no creature of God is possessed by God antecedently to its creation; therefore
3. No perfection of God is a creature.

Employing the first doctrine as major premise and the conclusion to the preceding argument as minor premise, one can then construct the following syllogism in *Camestres*:³⁰

1. Everything other than God is a creature of God;
2. No perfection of God is a creature of God; therefore
3. No perfection of God is other than God.

Now, one can validly permute the conclusion of this syllogism into the proposition: Every perfection of God is not other than God. Since the principle of the excluded middle dictates that that which is not other must be the same, one can justly conclude, then, that God is the same as each of his attributes: that, in other words, he is simple.³¹

The Bible corroborates this claim, moreover, not only by supplying premises from which it may be deduced, but also by testifying that God possesses the characteristics one would expect of a metaphysically simple being. Such a being, for instance, is, as

²⁹*Modus tollens* is a mode of reasoning from a hypothetical proposition according to which if the consequent be denied the antecedent is denied (as, if *a* is true, *b* is true, but *b* is false: therefore *a* is false). Or: If *p* then *q*; $\sim q$; therefore, $\sim p$.

³⁰*Camestres* represents the second mood of the second figure of syllogisms, in which the major premise is a universal affirmative, the minor premise and conclusion universal negatives.

³¹For the idea of deriving the doctrine of divine simplicity from the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, we are indebted to Brian Leftow, “Is God an Abstract Object?” *Noûs* 24 (1990), 581-98.

we have seen, *per definitionem* identical with his attributes; and the Bible, accordingly, identifies God with the divine attributes of existence (Exod. 3:14), truth (John 14:6), life (John 11:25; 14:26), light (1 John 1:5), and love (1 John 4:8, 16). A simple being, likewise, possesses *per definitionem* the perfection of immutability; and the Bible, accordingly, ascribes immutability to God in his being (Psa. 102: 26-7; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:10-12, 13:8; James 1:17) and in his will (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Psa. 33:11; Rom. 11:29; Heb. 6:17-18). It seems overwhelmingly likely, therefore, that the Bible does, at least indirectly, teach the doctrine of divine simplicity.

b. The transitivity of identity. The evidence that the Bible also sanctions the principle of the transitivity of identity, i.e., the principle that if $a=b$ and $b=c$, then $a=c$, seems similarly compelling. Christ himself seems to employ this principle, for instance, in Matt 25:34-40. At the final judgment, he announces, the Son of man “will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me *something* to drink,’” etc.. “Then,” Christ continues, “the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you *something* to drink?’” etc.. “[And] the king will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to me.’”

Christ answers the question of the righteous, in other words, with the equivalent of the following syllogism in *Dimaris*:³²

1. You are all those who have cared for my brothers;
2. All those who have cared for my brothers are those who have cared for me; therefore
3. You are those who have cared for me.

Now, if one signifies “you” with “a,” “all those who have cared for my brothers” with “b,” and “those who have cared for me” with “c,” one can restate this argument as: if $a=b$ and $b=c$, then $a=c$.

³²*Dimaris* designates the third mood of the fourth figure of syllogisms, in which the major premise is a particular affirmative, the minor a universal affirmative, and the conclusion a particular affirmative.

The principle of the transitivity of identity thus appears to possess Scriptural, and even dominical, warrant.

c. *The eternal generation of the Son.* That the Bible also witnesses to the Father's eternal generation of the Son seems equally evident from the text of Scripture itself. The Bible testifies to this doctrine most notably by designating Christ the Father's "only begotten Son," (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).³³ By representing the Son as the Father's Word (Psa. 33:6; John 1:1, 14) and Wisdom (Psa. 136:5; Prov. 3:19; Jer. 10:12; 51:15; 1 Cor. 1:24), moreover, Scripture identifies this begetting as an immanent generation *per modum intellectionis* and thus clarifies how the absolutely immaterial Father can "beget" a consubstantial Son. Lest anyone attempt to construe this intelligible generation as a merely temporal

³³The NRSV translators render *monogenh,j* in each of these verses merely as "only." This, of course, is not an unreasonable translation. The frequent employment of *monogenh,j* by the Septuagint's translators as an equivalent of *dyx.y'*, in fact, weighs quite heavily in favor of the NRSV translation, and even the AV renders *monogenh,j* as "only" in Luke 7:12, 8:42, and 9:48.

In each of the five instances (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) in which John employs the word, however, he places it in close proximity to passages concerning spiritual begetting and birth. Now, the connection between the word *monogenh,j* and words like *genna,w*, *ge,nnhma*, and *ge,nnhsij*, all of which can refer to birth and begetting, is too obvious to escape the attention of John or that of his readers. John's intense concern for establishing parallels between Christ and Christians, moreover, renders implausible the hypothesis that John juxtaposed *monogenh,j* with "begetting" language five times purely by accident. It seems, therefore, that, the Septuagint translators' use of *monogenh,j* notwithstanding, one cannot reasonably deny that John intends for his readers to understand this term as at least connotative of begetting: i.e., as "only begotten" and not merely "only."

We owe the argument of this footnote to Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus* (Johannes G. Vos, rev.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953²), 212-18. Cf. John V. Dahms' excellent article, "The Johannine Use of *Monogenēs* Reconsidered," *NTS* 29 (1983), 222-32.

occurrence, finally, Scripture testifies that Christ's "goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2).³⁴

d. The eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. That the Father also eternally "spirates" the Holy Spirit, that is, that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the person of the Father, appears, likewise, from John 15:26. In this text, Christ tells his disciples that "when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds [evkporeuetai] from the Father, he will testify about me." Some exegetes,³⁵ admittedly, have seen in the

³⁴The NRSV translators render Micah 5:2b: "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." It would seem more apt, however, to render tAac'Am as "goings forth" and thus to alert the reader to the etymological connection between ha'c'Am and ac'y'. The NRSV rendering of ~l'A[as "ancient," moreover, seems incongruous when one considers the purpose for which Micah employs the term: viz., to contrast the obscurity of Bethlehem, the future king's home town, with the antiquity (which connotes eminence) of his ancestry. For Micah could hardly have regarded David, who died less than 150 years before the outset of Micah's prophetic career, as an "ancient" ancestor of Christ, and Christ's descent from genuinely ancient dignitaries such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham would not have distinguished him from the ordinary Jew.

The translation of ~l'A[as "ancient," therefore, seems to deprive Micah's comparison of rhetorical impact. If Micah employed this term in the sense of "eternity," however, it seems that he would convey a stark contrast. Since ~l'A[appears elsewhere in the Old Testament with the meaning "eternity" (cf. Ps 90:2 and Isa 63:16); and since, by employing ~l'A[with the meaning, "eternity," Micah would achieve the rhetorical end he obviously seeks; it seems not improbable that Micah himself employs ~l'A[in this sense. In the context of Micah 5:2, therefore, "eternity" seems a more reasonable translation for ~l'A[than "ancient."

The argument of this footnote derives principally from Theodore Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 270, 272; and E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament 1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1854), 480-85, 489-91.

³⁵Cf., for instance, Hans-Christian Kammler, "Jesus Christus und der Paraklet: Eine Studie zur johanneischen Verhältnisbestimmung von Pneumatologie und Christologie," in Kammler and Otfried Hofius, *Johannesstudien: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des vierten Evangeliums* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996), 87-190 at 117; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium: III. Teil: Kommentar zu Kap. 13-21* (HThKNT;

phrase, “who proceeds from the Father” (ο[παρα του/ πατρο, j evk-poreu-etai) a reference, not to the Spirit’s eternal procession from the Father, but to his temporal mission in salvation history. The tense of the verb “proceeds” (evk-poreu-etai), however, positively excludes this interpretation. For, at this point in salvation history, “the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). The verb, “proceeds” (evk-poreu-etai), then, can refer only to an immanent divine act which, by virtue of God’s eternity and immutability, must continue unchanged forever.³⁶ John 15:26, therefore, at least seems to teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the person of the Father.

That the Holy Spirit also derives his personal being from the eternal Logos appears from John 16:12-15 in which Christ says:

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose *it* to you. All things that the Father has are mine; therefore I said that he takes of mine and will disclose *it* to you.

As Bruce Marshall explains, this text implies, according to the consensus of Lutheran scholastics, that the Spirit proceeds not merely from the Father alone, but also from the Son: *a patre filioque*. In his words:

The Spirit, after all, fully shares the one divine essence with the Father and the Son. He is therefore in full possession of the knowledge (that is, the omniscience) which the persons who possess that nature enjoy. What then could the Spirit possibly “take” from the Son, or “hear” from the Son, if he already has the divine essence from the Father

Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1976), 136; and Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel: Vol. 2* (Francis Noel Davey, ed.; London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 569.

³⁶We owe this argument to George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974: orig., 1889), 111 and 114. Cf. also William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1954), 314; M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon St. Jean* (EB; Paris: Gabalda, 1927), 413; Frédéric Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John 2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1886), 170-1.

alone? He would already have everything the Son could possibly give him, everything which he could receive from the Son, without taking or “hearing” it from the Son at all. . . . If the Spirit takes from the Son at all, as John here says he does, then he can take from him nothing less than the divine essence.³⁷

John 16:12-15, accordingly, seems very much to indicate that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds not only from the Father, but also from the Son.

3. *The specifically Trinitarian realities of Scripture.* The Bible testifies clearly, then, to: (a) God’s absolute simplicity; (b) the soundness of the principle of the transitivity of identity; and (c) the existence of generation and spiration, the eternal processions by which the Son originates from the Father and the Holy Spirit originates from the Father and the Son. In each of the two eternal processions, moreover, one can discern a principle and a term as well as two opposed relations: that of the *principium* to the *principiatum* and *vice versa*. These are the specifically Trinitarian realities identified by the Bible, i.e., those aspects of God that indubitably pertain to the Trinitarian persons insofar as one can distinguish them from the one, divine essence.

Some subset of these, or perhaps the whole set, it seems, must constitute the basis of real distinction within the eternal Trinity: i.e., that element in virtue of which the Father is really diverse from the Son, and in virtue of which the Father and Son are really diverse from the Holy Spirit. Since the Bible reveals God’s absolute simplicity and the transitivity of identity no less than it reveals the real diversity of the Trinitarian persons, one may reasonably suppose that whatever diversifies the divine persons from one another does so in such a way as not to compromise the doctrines of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity.

³⁷“The Defense of the Filioque in Classical Lutheran Theology: An Ecumenical Appreciation,” *NZSTb* 44 (2002), 154-73 at 170. The Holy Spirit is said to receive the divine essence not because he derives his being, *qua* essential, from the Father and Son, but because his possession of the divine essence *qua* distinct presupposes that of the Father and the Son. His procession *qua* personal from the Father and Son notwithstanding, then, the Holy Spirit *qua* essential is *auctoqeo,j*.

4. *The method of the proof.* This necessary compatibility of the doctrine of the Trinity with divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity, moreover, suggests a simple means of discovering, by process of elimination, precisely what renders the Trinitarian persons really distinct from each other. If a real distinction between two Trinitarian realities as such proves incompatible with divine simplicity or the transitivity of identity, then, one can say with absolute certainty that these realities do not diversify the Trinitarian persons. Such a verdict, of course, would not imply that the realities in question pertain simply to the common, divine essence. It would mean, rather, that these realities pertain to the Trinitarian persons *qua* distinct only insofar as divine simplicity renders them identical to whatever actually diversifies the persons of the Trinity. One can determine at least which Trinitarian realities do not constitute the Trinitarian persons as distinct, then, simply by determining whether the various conceivable distinctions cohere with the doctrines of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity.

5. *The proof itself.* Divine simplicity, as we have seen, dictates that nothing in God can differ objectively from the divine essence. The law of the transitivity of identity, likewise, dictates that if any two realities are identical to some third reality, they must also be identical to each other *secundum rem*, though not necessarily *secundum rationem*: i.e., in fact though perhaps not in concept. One can reasonably infer from the identity of divine justice and divine love with the divine essence, therefore, that these two realities must be ultimately identical. One would commit the fallacy of equivocation, however, if one argued in *Darapti*:³⁸

³⁸*Darapti* designates the first mood of the third figure of syllogisms, in which both premises are universal affirmatives, and the conclusion a particular affirmative. The validity of syllogisms in *Darapti* has been contested on the grounds that universal propositions lack existential import: i.e., that they abstract from the question of whether the classes to which they refer possess actual members. Hence, the argument goes, one cannot reasonably deduce a particular, contingent conclusion from universal premises that may refer to “null classes” or “empty sets.”

The theses that universal propositions always lack existential import, and that singular propositions always possess existential import, however, seem not to be verified in ordinary discourse. For, *contra* the second thesis, human beings utter singular propositions about, say, Leopold Bloom in

1. Every virtue that is divine justice is divine love;
2. Every virtue that is divine justice is that virtue on account of which God must punish sin; therefore
3. Divine love is that virtue on account of which God must punish sin.

This argument is no sounder than the following, also in *Darapti*:

1. Every star named Hesperus is Phosphorus;
2. Every star named Hesperus is the evening star; therefore
3. Phosphorus is the evening star.³⁹

By employing the middle term *secundum rem et non rationem* in the major premise and then *secundum rem et rationem* in the minor premise, the person who argues thus generates a radically false conclusion *secundum rationem*.

The gap between *res* and *ratio*, of course, leads to no real distinction between the divine attributes, because they can exist and function in the absence of a human observer who would perceive them according to differentiated *rationes*. The divine attributes, therefore, can differ only according to rational distinctions, i.e., distinctions imposed by human beings' limited powers of reasoning. They cannot, however, differ in themselves. The same holds, it seems, for the principles and terms of the divine processions and even the processions themselves insofar as one considers these

full knowledge that, in so doing, they are not predicating extra-mental existence of anything. *Contra* the first thesis, moreover, the Apostle Paul utters the universal proposition, "there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10), and thereby expresses a contingent fact without in any way prescinding from the conditions of actual existence.

In any event, those who regard universal propositions as incapable of intimating the existence of particular things may conform our arguments in *Darapti* to their standards by supplying the premise, "the sets referred to in this argument are not empty," in each case. We are indebted for the argument of this footnote to I. M. Bocheński, *A History of Formal Logic* (Ivo Thomas, tr.; New York: Chelsea Press, 1970), 221-4, 365-7 and Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Logic* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 225-33.

³⁹We owe this example to A. P. Martinich "Identity and Trinity," *JR* 58 (1978), 169-81 at 180. Martinich himself credits the example to Leonard Linsky, "Hesperus and Phosphorus," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), 515-19.

realities *qua* absolute, sc. in abstraction from the opposed relations. In fact, one could even say, “Phosphorus is the evening star,” in a true sense if one intended these terms purely *secundum rem* abstracting from considerations of *ratio*.

The opposed relations to which the intra-Trinitarian processions give rise, however, differ in one all-important respect from the divine attributes and the divine processions, etc. when they are considered in abstraction from the relations. Unlike these other realities, the intra-Trinitarian relations possess *rationes* in themselves regardless of whether human beings contemplate them or not; i.e., they possess *rationes* that are, in a certain respect, *res*. For human reasoning is not required to diversify the divine begetter from the divine begotten; nothing begets itself. The relations of the Son to the Father as his begetter and of the Father to the Son as his only begotten, therefore, exist regardless of whether human beings consider these relations in accordance with imperfect, human concepts.

When one reasons, then, in *Darapti*:

1. Every entity that is God is the divine Father;
2. Every entity that is God is the divine Son; therefore
3. The divine Father is the divine Son;

one does not, as in the syllogism concerning divine justice and divine love, reach a conclusion that is invalid *secundum rationem*, but valid *secundum rem*. For the *rationes* of the divine relations are *res*. The oppositions of relation implied in the names “Father” and “Son,” accordingly, render this syllogism and others like it invalid not only *secundum rationem*, but also *secundum rem*. Unlike the principles and terms of the divine processions and those processions themselves, insofar as these are distinct from the relations of opposition, the intra-Trinitarian relations of opposition do not simply collapse into each other under the collective weight of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity. It seems to follow, then, that relations of opposition alone can subsist in real distinction from each other without undermining divine simplicity or the transitivity of identity.

6. *Two difficulties*. This conclusion, however, seems liable to two difficulties. It might seem, first, that one who treats the relations of opposition between the persons as *res*, and not merely *rationes*, implicitly denies the doctrine of divine simplicity; and second, that

the foregoing argument discredits the law of the transitivity of identity and thus undermines one of its own presuppositions.

a. Persons, perfections, and simplicity. The first difficulty arises from the following considerations. The relations' *rationes*, as distinguishing properties of the divine hypostases, cannot constitute simple perfections of the divine essence; if they did, each divine person would be imperfect insofar as he lacked the personal property of the other two. Yet neither may one correctly regard them as mere aspects under which one considers the one, divine *res* if these *rationes* constitute really distinct *res* of themselves. In order to distinguish these relations' *rationes* from simple perfections of the divine essence, then, it might seem that one must posit a real distinction between the *res* of the relations and that of the divine essence. If one posited such a distinction, however, one would represent the absolutely simple God of the Bible as a fourfold composite. One might be tempted to conclude, therefore, that one ought to avoid characterizing the intra-Trinitarian relations' *rationes* as really distinct *res* in order to avert this intolerable consequence.

It seems at least negatively demonstrable, nonetheless, that the idea that the divine relations possess, or rather are, really distinct *res*, and not merely *rationes*, does not conflict with the doctrine of divine simplicity. For, in spite of the "reality" of the relations' *rationes*, one can reasonably differentiate, albeit to a very slight extent, between *res* and *ratio* even in the divine relations. Specifically, one can justly distinguish between the very existence of a divine relation and its reference to another: between, in other words, its *esse in* and its *esse ad*.

The *esse ad* of a divine relation of opposition, i.e., that *ratio* by virtue of which it is a relation,⁴⁰ exists, as we have seen, not only in the rational, but also in the real order. It exists in the real order, however, only by virtue of its identity *secundum rem* with the relation's *esse in*. "The *esse in*," as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange phrases it, "is the title to reality of the *esse ad*."⁴¹ For a relation, as a

⁴⁰"The formal *ratio* of relations," writes Turretin, "is not *in esse*, but *esse ad*" (*Institutio theologiae elencticae* 1 [Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1689], loc. 3, q. 7.15, p. 212).

⁴¹*The Trinity and God the Creator: A Commentary on St. Thomas' Theological Summa, Ia, q. 27-119* (Frederic C. Eckhoff, tr.; St. Louis and London: Herder, 1952), 118.

reference of one thing to another, cannot exist in the real order if it inheres in no real subject that admits of being thus referred.

Although each divine relation's *esse ad* really exists by virtue of its objective identity with the *esse in* of the divine essence, this *esse ad*, considered in abstraction from the divine essence, has no being of itself that could be composed with the *esse in* of the divine substance. The threat that this *esse ad* poses to divine simplicity, therefore, seems nugatory. One cannot undermine the argument above to the effect that only relations of opposition can diversify the divine persons, then, by representing the identity of *ratio* and *res* in these relations as inconsistent with divine simplicity.

b. Presuppositions about identity. One might also object, however, that the outcome of this investigation seems to discredit, at least in a particular case, the principle of the transitivity of identity. If the identity of the Father with God and of the Son with God does *not* entail the identity of the Father and the Son, one might argue, then the principle of the transitivity of identity is not universally applicable. If this were the case, of course, it would be senseless to claim that only those distinctions can exist within the Godhead, which do not violate the law of the transitivity of identity. The method by which we have sought to determine precisely what diversifies the Trinitarian persons, correspondingly, would be highly misleading.

Exegetical and logical considerations, however, seem to falsify the thesis that the arguments against Trinitarian orthodoxy fail because of some exception to the law of the transitivity of identity. For, first, the Bible employs the law of the transitivity of identity in reasoning about God. In Rev. 4:11, for instance, one reads, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." One need merely supply the suppressed premise of this enthymeme to translate this argument into the following syllogism in *Darii*:⁴²

⁴²*Darii* designates the third mood of the first figure of syllogisms, in which the major premise is a universal affirmative, and the minor premise and conclusion particular affirmatives; thus, All *a* are *b* ; Some *c* are *a* ; therefore, Some *c* are *b*.

1. Every entity that created all things for its own pleasure is worthy of glory, honor, and power;
2. God is an entity that created all things for its own pleasure; therefore
3. God is worthy of glory, honor, and power.

The Bible, therefore, disallows the conclusion that the law of the transitivity of identity simply does not apply *in divinis*.

It seems likely, then, second, that those who argue in *Darapti*:

1. Every entity that is God is the divine Father;
2. Every entity that is God is the divine Son; therefore
3. The Father is the Son;

reach a false conclusion, not because the law of the transitivity of identity fails to hold, but because they equivocate in their use of the syllogism's middle term, "every entity that is God." When one speaks of God the Father, that is to say, one refers not simply to God, but to God begetting. When one speaks of God the Son, however, one refers, properly speaking, to God begotten. The premises of the false syllogism above, consequently, could be written as:

1. Every entity that is God begetting is the divine Father;
2. Every entity that is God begotten is the divine Son.

A middle term, in the proper sense of those words, simply does not exist in a syllogism that identifies the Father with the Son on the basis of their common identity with the divine essence.⁴³ If one abstracts from the proper *rationes* of the persons so as to render the middle term univocal, however, one renders the argument of such a syllogism innocuous from the points of view of logic and

⁴³This point, of course, is hardly original. Cf., e.g., Johannes Braun, *Doctrina foederum sive systema theologiae didacticae et elencticae* (Amsterdam: Abraham van Someren, 1688), vol. 1, pars 2, c. 6.19, p. 117. A similar process of reasoning leads to the conclusion that the divine essence, considered in abstraction, without precision, from the persons, "is neither generating, nor generated, nor proceeding" (DH 804; cf. the ninth of Ussher's Irish Articles of Religion). For the divine essence *simpliciter* is equivalent *secundum rationem* neither with God begetting, nor with God begotten, nor with God proceeding.

orthodoxy. No orthodox theologian should object, except perhaps on terminological grounds, to the argument in *Darapti*:

1. Every entity that is God is the divine Father abstracting without precision from his fatherhood;
2. Every entity that is God is the divine Son abstracting without precision from his sonship; therefore
3. The divine Father abstracting without precision from his fatherhood is the divine Son abstracting without precision from his sonship.

In other words, the divine essence is the divine essence.

7. *Conclusion.* It seems, then, that one can establish, without appealing to extra-Scriptural premises, that relative opposition alone diversifies the divine persons each of whom is identical with the one, absolutely simple Godhead. In other words, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes.”⁴⁴

As we have seen, this axiom implies that the Trinitarian persons do not exert distinct influences on creation: it implies, that is to say, the truth expressed in the axiom, “the operations of the Trinity are inseparable.”⁴⁵ If the divine persons exert no distinct influences on creation, moreover, the economic Trinity, at least in the sense in which Rahner employs the term, simply does not exist. Insofar, then, as: (a) we have proved that “in God all things are one where no opposition of relation intervenes;” and (b) this axiom does imply the inseparability of the divine acts *ad extra*; (c) one can reasonably conclude that the *Grundaxiom* is false, at least according to Rahner’s interpretation of it.

IV. Putative Counterexamples

It would be premature, however, to declare Rahner’s axiom positively disproved before we have considered Rahner’s alleged counterexamples to the principle that the divine persons exercise no distinct influences on creation: viz., the Incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in human souls.

⁴⁴DH 1330.

⁴⁵DH 491, 535.

1. *The Incarnation.* Of his first example, the Incarnation, Rahner writes:

Jesus is not simply God in general, but the Son. The second divine person, God's Logos, is man, and only he is man. Hence there is at least *one* "mission," *one* presence in the world, *one* reality of salvation history which is not merely appropriated to some divine person, but which is proper to him. . . . This *one* case shows up as *false* the statement that there is nothing in salvation history, in the economy of salvation, which cannot equally be said of the triune God as a whole and of each person in particular. On the other hand, the following statement too is *false*: that a doctrine of the Trinity . . . can speak only of that which occurs within the Trinity itself.⁴⁶

In one sense, all of this is true; Scripture unquestionably requires one to hold that the Son alone, and neither the Father nor the Spirit, was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, etc.. It seems, however, that one can reconcile to a certain extent the doctrine that the Logos alone constitutes the ontological subject who acts in Christ's human nature with the doctrine of the absolute inseparability of the divine acts *ad extra*.

The possibility of such a partial reconciliation appears from the following argument, which we derive principally from Aquinas. One may legitimately distinguish, Thomas reasons, between a human person and an individual,⁴⁷ human nature. In his words, "not every individual in the genus of substance, even in a rational nature, has the *rationem personae*, but only that which exists *per se*: not, however, that which exists in another, more perfect thing. Hence a hand of

⁴⁶*Trinity*, 23; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 329.

⁴⁷John of Damascus distinguishes between three senses of the term "nature": the purely intentional, universal nature that does not inform any individual; the universal nature that informs every individual included under its aegis; and the individual nature, i.e., the universal nature as determined by individuating features. In his words: "Nature is either understood in bare thought (for in the same it does not subsist); or commonly in all hypostases of the same species uniting them, and [in this case] it is said to be considered in the species; or entirely the same, having received accidents in addition, in a single hypostasis, and [in this case] it is said to be nature considered in an individual" (*Expositio Fidei* 55 in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* 2 [Bonifatius Kotter, ed.; PTS 12; Berlin and New York: Gruyter, 1973], 131).

Socrates, however much it is a kind of individual, yet it is not a person, because it does not exist *per se*, but in a certain more perfect thing, sc. in its whole” (*STb* III, 2, 2 ad 3). Because Scripture ascribes works performed through both of Christ’s natures to the hypostasis of the Logos, moreover, one can reasonably assume that this hypostasis constitutes, in a certain sense at least, that “more perfect thing” in which Christ’s human nature exists.⁴⁸ Expressions like “they . . . crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8) and “[you] put to death the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15) seem scarcely intelligible on any other premise.

The idea that Christ’s humanity “exists in,” and is therefore incomplete without, the hypostasis of the Logos, however, generates something of an antinomy. For the datum of the incompleteness of Christ’s human nature without the Logos seems to imply that this nature, of itself, lacks at least one natural characteristic of humanity, viz., that of existing in itself and not in some greater being. One cannot reasonably claim, however, that “*the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5) who “had to be made like his brethren in all things” (Heb. 2:17) lacks any natural aspect of humanity. The revealed data, then, seem to require one both to affirm and to deny that Christ’s human nature subsists in itself.

The idea that Christ’s human nature is anhypostatic, or non-subsistent, in itself and yet enhypostatic, or subsistent, in the person of the Logos, however, seems to offer a solution to this dilemma. As John of Damascus explains:

Although there is neither an anhypostatic nature nor an impersonal essence . . . there is no necessity for natures united to each other in hypostasis to possess each a distinct hypostasis. For they can join in one hypostasis [so as] neither to be anhypostatic nor to have each a distinguishing hypostasis, but to have one and the same hypostasis.

⁴⁸The relation of Christ’s human nature to the hypostasis of the Logos differs from the relation of a hand to a human being, of course, in that: (a) the hand constitutes a part of a larger individual nature, whereas Christ’s human nature is an individual nature in its own right; and (b) the hand, as long as it is attached to a larger human body, never attains the perfection of subsistence, properly speaking, whereas Christ’s human nature, as united to the Logos, does. Christ’s human nature, that is to say, becomes an integral, subsistent being, and not merely a part of a subsistent being, by virtue of its relation to the Logos, as we shall see in the coming paragraphs.

For the same hypostasis of the Logos, the hypostasis of both natures, a most singular hypostasis, neither allows one of them to be anhypostatic, nor, surely, allows them to have different hypostases from each other, nor at one time to have one and at another time another, but is always of both undividedly and inseparably the hypostasis, being neither distributed nor cloven, nor part of it allotted to one, part of it allotted to the other, but entirely of this and entirely of that indivisibly and integrally.⁴⁹

Divine revelation need not contradict itself, therefore, when it implies both that Christ's human nature is incomplete without the Logos and that this nature possesses that subsistence, which naturally accrues to every individual, human nature. The two implications cohere if, and only if, the perfection of subsistence, a perfection that accrues to ordinary, individual, human natures simply on account of their humanity, accrues to Christ's human nature by virtue of the hypostatic union alone.

A critic, of course, might object that the failure of Christ's humanity to attain subsistence purely of itself seems to betoken some deficiency on its part. It seems, nonetheless, that one could obviate this difficulty by postulating: (1) that God, by some supernatural intervention, inhibits Christ's human nature from attaining subsistence of itself; and (2) that Christ's human nature, in the absence of such inhibition, would develop subsistence without the aid of a hypostatic union.

The critic, however, could reply that since such a divine "inhibition" would be superfluous, one lacks sufficient grounds for postulating its occurrence. To this argument, it seems, one could respond by conceding that such inhibition would be superfluous if it were not necessary to the effecting of the hypostatic union. Christ's individual, human nature could hardly come to share in the hypostasis of the Logos, however, if it possessed its own, independent subsistence. Since Christ's human nature, as fully and perfectly human, would come to subsist in itself, just as any other particular, human nature, in the absence of some supernatural inhibition, then, such an inhibition does seem necessary to the accomplishment of the hypostatic union.⁵⁰

⁴⁹*Expositio Fidei* 53 in Kotter 2, 128.

⁵⁰Commenting on a decretal according to which "the person of God consumed the person of man," Aquinas explains: "Consumption here does

The biblical account of Christ's ontological constitution thus seems to dictate: (a) that Christ's human nature does not subsist of itself, because God supernaturally inhibits it from subsisting in its own right, and; (b) that Christ's human nature possesses that subsistence, which characterizes all individual, human natures, only through its union with the divine Logos. It follows, then, that one can determine at least one aspect of what union with the divine Logos adds to Christ's individual, human nature by determining what the perfection of subsistence adds to an individual nature as such. What differentiates a subsistent from a non-subsistent, individual nature, as we have seen, is that the first exists *per se* while the second exists in a greater whole. The rearward half of a worm, for example, does not subsist as long as the worm remains intact. Once one slices the worm in half, however, the rearward half begins to subsist.

Subsistence, then, seems to constitute nothing more than a terminus⁵¹ that distinguishes an individual nature from other beings of the same sort. Now, it seems that one could correctly, albeit analogically, describe the eternal Logos, insofar as he is diverse from the Father and the Holy Spirit, as just such a terminus on the level of divine being. For, *qua* distinct, the Logos consists precisely in the relation of opposition that distinguishes him from the other divine persons.

It is, admittedly, impossible to demonstrate *a priori* that God can cause an individual human nature to terminate in a particular divine person in such a way as to subsist in this person without either disrupting the simplicity of the divine essence or so modifying the assumed nature as to render it inhuman. The inconceivability of such a proof, however, derives not from the

not import the destruction of anything that was before, but the impeding of that which otherwise would have been. For if the human nature had not been assumed by a divine person, the human nature would have had its proper personality; and to this extent the person is said to have consumed a person, admittedly improperly, because the divine person by his union impeded, that the human nature might not have a proper personality" [*STh* III, 4, 2 ad 3].

⁵¹"Personality [= subsistence in a rational nature]," writes Turretin, "is neither an integral nor an essential part of a nature, but *quasi terminus*" (*Institutio theologiae elencticae* 2 [Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1689], loc. 13, q. 6.4, p. 338).

intrinsic absurdity of the idea that God thus unites an individual human nature to the person of the Logos, but from the entitatively, and not merely modally, supernatural character of the hypostatic union. Christ's grace of union, that is to say, "exceeds the exigencies and powers of all created and creatable natures"⁵² so that one cannot infer the possibility of God's bestowing such a grace *a maiori ad minorum* from his prior creative activity: whereas one can, for instance, infer from God's creation of human bodies the possibility of his reconstituting those bodies in the general resurrection.⁵³ Nevertheless, one can establish the possibility of the hypostatic union *a posteriori* from its actual, supernatural accomplishment. One can, therefore, rationally entertain the possibility of God's supernaturally inhibiting a particular human nature from terminating in a merely human subsistence and causing it, instead, to terminate in the divine subsistence of the eternal Logos.

If one can reasonably suspect that God might have accomplished the hypostatic union in this way, however, then one can also reasonably suspect that "the coming of the Son into his flesh . . . presupposes neither on his part nor on the part of the Father nor on the part of the Holy Spirit any action or influence that pertains to him alone."⁵⁴ For, if the divine essence united Christ's particular, human nature to the Logos as to its term, then the Logos, insofar as it differs from the Father and the Holy Spirit, could constitute the ontological subject of that human nature without acting *qua* Logos at all.⁵⁵ Christ's individual, human nature,

⁵²Adolphe Tanquerey, *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae Specialis* 1 (Paris: Desclée, 1913¹⁴), §863(b), p. 523.

⁵³We derive our argument for the impossibility of proving *a priori* that God can bestow entitatively supernatural graces such as Christ's grace of union from Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa* (Bede Rose, tr.; St. Louis and London: Herder, 1944), 336.

⁵⁴Paul Galtier, *L'Habitation en nous des trois Personnes: Le fait—le mode* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928²), 40.

⁵⁵As Aquinas explains, "assumption imports two things, sc. an act of assuming and a term of the assumption. The act of assuming . . . proceeds from the divine power that is common to the three persons: but the term of assumption is a person....Therefore, that which is of action in assumption, is common to the three persons, but that which pertains to the *rationem termini* convenes precisely to one person, . . . [and] not to

in this event, would relate to the eternal Logos as a line relates to its utmost extremity. It would terminate in the Logos, that is, and find in the Logos alone the completeness of a subsistent while suffering no more action from the Logos *qua* Logos than a line suffers from its terminal point.

It seems at least minimally plausible, then, that the divine persons, while exercising no personally distinguished causality whatsoever, could unite Christ's human nature to the Logos as to its term in such a way that the Logos becomes the ontological subject of that particular nature. As long as the divine persons maintained Christ's particular, human nature in this relationship to the Logos, in such a case, the Logos alone, as distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit, would constitute the ontological subject of that nature. One can, therefore, conceive of a not evidently impossible scenario in which: (a) one could truly affirm, for instance, that the Logos died on the cross; (b) one could not truly affirm this, however, of the Father or of the Holy Spirit; and yet (c) one could not truly deny that the divine persons always act inseparably. *Pace* Rahner, then, one can hold to the absolute inseparability of the divine acts *ad extra* without implicitly denying that the Son and the Son alone was born of Mary, suffered, died, and rose again in a particular, human nature. One can reasonably believe, although one cannot demonstrate, that the doctrines of the Incarnation and the inseparability of all divine acts *ad extra* do not necessarily conflict.

2. *The indwelling of the Holy Spirit.* Rahner finds his second, putative counterexample to the principle that "the operations of the Trinity are inseparable"⁵⁶ in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit," Rahner writes, "dwells in us in a particular and proper way."⁵⁷ In a footnote, Rahner explains his position more precisely.

By this it is not of course meant that the Spirit alone makes his dwelling in us. Each person communicates himself and dwells in us in a way proper to him. And because the indwelling ascribed to the Holy Spirit in Scripture (as a power who sanctifies, consecrates, moves, etc.) corresponds precisely to the personal particularity of the Spirit and of

another" (*STh* III 3, 4 corp.). Cf. the similar remarks of Turretin, *Institutio* 2, loc. 13, q. 6.4. p. 338 and Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae Christianae* (Amsterdam: Jannsens, 1642²), lib. 1, c. 16, p. 79.

⁵⁶DH 491, 535.

⁵⁷"Uncreated Grace," *TI* i, 345; "Ungeschaffene Gnade," *SzTh* i, 374.

his going forth from the Father and the Son, there is absolutely no objection to saying that in *this* way only the Spirit dwells in man.⁵⁸

Before answering this objection, it will be useful to draw a distinction between distinct presence and distinct effects. It is self-evident, once one admits that each divine person possesses the divine essence in his own distinctive way (the Father as God begetting, the Son as God begotten, and the Holy Spirit as God proceeding), that, wherever the divine persons dwell, they dwell distinctively in accordance with the manner in which they possess the divine essence. This datum, however, in no way implies that the divine persons exert distinct influences on creatures and, therefore, in no way undermines the axioms, "In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes," and "the operations of the Trinity are inseparable."

In isolation, accordingly, the statements by Rahner which we have just quoted do not conflict with our own position, although Rahner, like numerous others who fail to distinguish between distinct presence and distinct effects, seems not to realize this. In context, however, it is plain that Rahner intends to assert that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "have each *as* divine, mutually distinct Persons their own proper quasi-formal [i.e., radically self-communicative] causality upon the created spirit,"⁵⁹ and to adduce the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as an example of such personally differentiated influence.

Nonetheless, neither here nor elsewhere in his vast corpus does Rahner supply specific, biblical evidence for the thesis that the Holy Spirit impacts the souls of the justified in a way that the Father and the Son do not. Neither does he refer to the works of exegetes who espouse this view. This omission of exegetical evidence, however, is, quite understandable; for few, if any, biblical texts suggest unambiguously that the Holy Spirit influences creation in a way that the Father and Son do not.

The Holy Spirit, for instance, does unquestionably dwell in the justified (Num. 27:18; Prov. 1:23; Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-9; Hag. 2:5; Zech. 12:10; John 14:17; Acts 2:17-18; Rom. 8:9, 11, 23; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13-14; 5:18; 1 Pet. 4:14); but so do the Father (John 14:23; 2 Cor.

⁵⁸Ibid., n. 2; ebd., Anm. 2.

⁵⁹Ibid., 345; ebd., 373.

6:16; Eph. 2:22; 1 John 4:12-13, 15-16) and the Son (John 6:56; 14:20, 23; 15:4; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; Heb. 3:6; 1 John 3:23-4; 2 John 2; Rev. 3:20).

Scripture, then, plainly refers to the divine indwelling most often as the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not obvious, however, that Scripture regards the effects of the Spirit's actions in this regard as differing in the slightest from the effects wrought by the indwelling Father and Son. Rahner could, of course, point to other activities that one might wish to attribute in some distinctive way to the Holy Spirit. The Bible, for instance, states in the most emphatic terms that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the justified (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 5:22-3; Eph. 2:22; 3:16; 5:9; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2, 22). Yet it ascribes this function also to the Father (Lev. 20:8; Ezek. 37:28; John 17:17; Acts 15:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Jude 1, 24-5) and to the Son (Eph. 5:26-7; 1 Thess. 3:12-13; Heb. 2:11; 10:14; 13:12) and differentiates the modes by which the persons accomplish the sanctification of believers only by correctly attributing its presupposition, the atonement, to Christ alone. Suffice it to say that one can easily manifest the absence of differentiation between the divine persons' roles also in the raising of the dead and the inspiration of Scripture: the only other functions commonly proposed as in some sense "special" to the Holy Spirit.

3. *Notional acts as counterexamples?*⁶⁰ The Incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, therefore, seem not to constitute genuine counterexamples to the axiom, "the operations of the Trinity are inseparable."⁶¹ Before declaring this axiom and that which it presupposes, viz., "In God all things are one where no opposition of relation intervenes,"⁶² positively proved and the *Grundaxiom* correspondingly refuted, however, it seems prudent to consider a final set of putative counterexamples: the so-called "notional" acts, sc. active and passive filiation (= the active and passive aspects of the Father's begetting of the Son) along with active and passive spiration (= the active and passive aspects of the

⁶⁰Scholastic theologians, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, employ the word "notion" (Latin *notio*) in the sense of "personal property": i.e., anything that pertains to a Trinitarian person *qua* distinct.

⁶¹DH 491, 535.

⁶²DH 1330.

intra-divine spiration, or “breathing,” of the Spirit by the Father and Son).⁶³

The axiom, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes,” as we have seen, implies: (a) that the divine persons possess no capacity for action insofar as they can be distinguished; and (b) that all divine acts, correspondingly, must derive from the divine essence rather than the persons *qua* distinct. If this is the case, one could argue, then the Father, *qua* Father, could not beget the Son; and the Father and Son, *qua* single notional principle,⁶⁴ could not spirate the Spirit. Since Scripture testifies to the reality of these notional acts, then, it might seem that Scripture directly contradicts the axiom, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes.”

This appearance of conflict, nonetheless, seems to derive from a faulty conception of the nature of notional acts. Scripture’s testimony to the reality of the notional acts, that is to say, would, indeed, falsify the axiom in question if the persons by their notional acts produced some effect. For, in that case, the principle of causality would demand that the agents responsible for the effect in question, *viz.*, the divine persons *qua* distinct, possess the requisite power.

In reality, however, the notional acts produce nothing and are objectively identical with the divine persons’ opposed relations. As Aquinas explains:

Notional acts differ from the relations of the persons only according to the mode of signifying; . . . with respect to the thing, they are entirely the same. . . . For just as motion as it is in the movable is called passion, so the origin of the motion itself, according as it

⁶³Rahner admits the objective identity of the divine persons’ relations of opposition with their notional acts (cf. *Trinity*, 73; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 364) and so does not advance the notional acts as counterexamples to the axiom, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes.” We discuss this putative counterexample, nonetheless, because: (a) we suspect it may occur to some readers; and (b) the solution to the problem presented by this “counterexample” clarifies the idea of intra-divine procession enormously.

⁶⁴The Father and the Son constitute a single notional principle vis-à-vis the Spirit, because their common relation to the Spirit involves no opposition of relation between them. For the same reason, this common relation does not constitute a fourth, divine person.

begins in another and is terminated in that which is moved, is called action. When one has removed [or prescinded from] motion, therefore, action imports nothing other than the order of origin according to which, from a certain cause or principle, it [i.e., the action] proceeds into that which is from the principle. Whence, because in God there is no motion, the personal act of bringing forth a person is nothing other than the habit of the principle towards the person who is from the principle: which habits themselves are relations or notions [*STb* Ia, 41, 1 ad 2].

In other words, when Scripture states, for example, that the Father begets the Son, it employs anthropomorphic language to convey the idea of the Son's origin from the Father. Scripture could not declare that motion occurs within the very deity, for this would contradict Scripture's own testimony to divine immutability. Scripture could not even characterize the Father-Son relation, or the relation of Father and Son as a single principle to the Spirit, as one of cause and effect, because the divine simplicity to which Scripture testifies excludes the ontological, and not merely relative, subordination implicit in the idea of causation from the Godhead. When one purifies the concepts of the notional acts from their merely creaturely aspects, therefore, one finds that Scripture's divine author intends to convey by these concepts nothing other than the idea of relation of origin.⁶⁵

V. Conclusion

Neither the Scriptural language of notional act, nor the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, nor the Incarnation of the divine Son, therefore, seems genuinely to falsify the axiom, "In God all things are one where no opposition of relation intervenes,"⁶⁶ or its corollary, "the operations of the Trinity are inseparable."⁶⁷ As we have seen, these axioms imply that God can reveal the doctrine of the Trinity to human beings, if he chooses to reveal it at all, in only two ways: through direct intuition of the divine essence, which those who have not yet attained to the beatific vision evidently do

⁶⁵When properly understood, therefore, the doctrines of divine generation and spiration constitute no obstacle whatsoever to a robust affirmation of the divine persons' equality.

⁶⁶DH 1330.

⁶⁷DH 491, 535.

not enjoy, or through a verbal revelation. The doctrine of the Trinity, consequently, presupposes the doctrine of Scripture's verbal inspiration; and Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa,"⁶⁸ is not merely *de facto*, but necessarily false.

⁶⁸"Oneness and Threefoldness," *TI* xviii, 114; "Einzigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit," *SzTh* xiii, 139.