

Apophysis and the Trinity: on the enduring significance of revelation for theology¹

GABRIEL MORGAN

Plato understood that describing God is impossible.² However, according to Gregory of Nazianzus, to know God is even less possible.³ Gregory radicalizes apophaticism in this way as a critique of Eunomius and his claim to know the divine nature by definition as that which is without origin. However, one can take apophaticism in at least two very different directions. One direction might argue that because God is unknowable and ineffable, therefore, in the words of Sallie McFague, “all language about God is human construction and as such perforce ‘misses the mark.’”⁴ Accordingly, one might argue that very few or even no religious or theological claims are any more inherently valid than another, and that such claims are to be evaluated by strictly moral or pragmatic considerations; theology should likewise progress from dogmatics to the methods of the general study of religion.⁵ However, another way of taking such radical apophaticism is precisely to recognize the enduring significance of revelation for theology. Rather than the final word, God’s ineffability and transcendence presupposes God’s condescension and revelation in the Trinitarian economy.

The following paper is an exercise in historical dogmatics. In it I attempt to offer what Paul Ricoeur called a non-violent appeal concerning the enduring significance of revelation for theology, and its implications for how we should think of theology as a discipline and the methods that we use in its study. In this endeavor, I have chosen to draw extensively from Gregory Nazianzen’s *Theological Orations*, but complimented by material from Catherine LaCugna, Paul Ricoeur, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther. I have taken this route not in order to

1 An abridged version of the following paper was presented at the Fordham graduate conference, “The Limits of the Thinkable: Religious Experience and the Apophatic Impulse Between Antiquity and Modernity,” with a keynote address from professor Catherine Keller, on 8 February 2014. I am grateful to Professor Keller for her encouragement.

2 *Timaeus*, 28c.

3 *Oration* 28.4, in Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham trans., *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2002); see also Frederick Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzen*, Wickham and Williams trans. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991).

4 Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 23.

5 e.g. John Hick’s position understands the various religious traditions to represent inadequate expressions of what ultimately remains an inaccessible Real, common to them all, similar to Kant’s phenomenal/noumenal distinction; see Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 113–7. See also Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 229.

cover over their real theological differences, but in order to make a more broadly ecumenical argument that focuses on an area of greater consensus, the doctrine of the Trinity.⁶ But the tradition from which I approach Gregory is not without its own reception, for Philip Melanchthon once praised Gregory as “the perpetual voice of the Church.”⁷ Gregory’s trinitarian theology is a fitting subject also because it is inherently concerned with the human knowledge of God. For my argument is focused upon the unity of the economic and immanent Trinity, which has epistemological consequences that are incompatible with the view that theology is reducible to human construction.

“Only the suffering God can help.” So wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer from Tegel prison on 16 July 1944. On what basis did Bonhoeffer make such a claim? According to Catherine LaCugna, how we answer this question gets at the very heart of Christian theology. After all, this was one of the major points of division between Nestorius and Cyril in the Christological controversy that led to Chalcedon in 451. Nestorius strictly denied that one could say God suffered, not even in the person of Christ, and considered it a pagan mentality to do so.⁸ Cyril, on the other hand, was quite adamant that the personal union of God and humanity in the person of Christ meant that in some paradoxical sense God was born, suffered, and died for us.⁹ One could affirm here a real communication of attributes, but the formulas themselves are not as important as the unity of the person, a point shared by Gregory, Cyril, and Bonhoeffer.¹⁰ For them, all human and divine attributes in Scripture are to refer to this single person, Jesus Christ, God on earth who suffered and died for us.¹¹ This Christological debate has some proximity for us today, in

6 This route differs from that taken by Tuomo Mannermaa, who has argued for a doctrine of *θέωσις* in Luther as the center of justification; see Braaten and Jenson eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Knut Alsvåg took a similar route to that proposed here in “Impassibility and Revelation: On the Relation between Immanence and Economy in Orthodox and Lutheran Thought” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, Maryland, November 22–26, 2013).

7 Philip Melanchthon, *De Gregorio*, 283–4; paraphrased in H. Ashley Hall, *Philip Melanchthon and the Cappadocians: A Reception of Greek Patristic Sources in the Sixteenth Century* (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2104), 100.

8 Nestorius, in his reply to Cyril’s second letter: “[T]o attribute to the Godhead, in the name of this appropriation [of the human nature], the properties of the flesh that is associated with it (and I mean generation, suffering, and death)... is either the error of a pagan mentality, brother, or a spirit sick with the madness of Apollinaris and Arius and other heresies, or even something far worse,” in John McGuckin, *St Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Press, 2004), 367.

9 In his third letter, Cyril replies: “[W]e understand that there is One Christ Jesus, the Only begotten Son, honoured together with his flesh in a single worship, and we confess that the same Son and Only Begotten God, born from God the Father, suffered in the flesh for our sake, in accordance with the scripture (cf. 1 Pet.4.1) even though he is impassible in his own nature,” *ibid*, 270.

10 See Bonhoeffer’s “Lectures on Christology,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 12, Best and Higgins, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 299–360.

11 See Nazianzen, *Ora.* 29.19, 33.14, 30.5, 45.28–9 and *Carm.* 1.1.10.6–9; in Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 134–9.

which the idea of the suffering God is moving even for theologians disinclined to speak of revelation.

Many are reluctant to return to this way of thinking because we are now so aware of “the constructive character of all human activities.”¹² Claims to revelation in the past have often and without question covered over various ideological systems that justified the oppression of one group over another, such as the justification of slavery in this country, or naively masculine images of God, or our ecological irresponsibility. Disillusioned, we are inclined toward a methodological skepticism in theology, as Erasmus had once advocated in his debate with Luther in 1525.¹³ Like Erasmus, we consider confidence in theological matters to be a result of arrogance. In the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, we are more aware today than ever of “the historicity of our being,” and of how everything we think and do is thoroughly interpretive.¹⁴

However, according to Paul Ricoeur, this is not a reason to reject the notion of revelation. On the contrary, this insight into the historical conditionality of the human being is the very reason that we must relinquish our desire to ground everything in our own consciousness. In an essay titled “Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” Ricoeur argued that “the pretension of consciousness to constitute itself is the most formidable obstacle to the idea of revelation.”¹⁵ In his earlier work *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur argued that “the will recognizes itself as evil, and admits its guilt, only in meditating on the symbols and myths carried by the great cultural traditions that have instructed the Western mind,” though he explains later that he had no intention of excluding non-western traditions with this comment.¹⁶ In other words, the self does not have a direct access to itself in its own consciousness, but understands itself only through external symbols, texts, narratives, events, and so forth.¹⁷

This recognition of our historical and hermeneutical conditionality brings about “on a purely epistemological, even a methodological level, consciousness’s *abandoning of its pretension* to constitute every signification in and beginning from itself.”¹⁸ This constitutes “a conversion diametrically opposed to that of Feuerbach.”¹⁹ What does this mean? For one thing, Ricoeur argues for an epistemology of external testimony, and an openness to the possibility that particular historical moments can become invested with absolute significance. “It is precisely the function of the category of testimony... to demolish a bit further the fortress of

12 McFague 1987, 21.

13 Erasmus, *Diatribes*, EAS 4, 28 f.; for Luther’s response, *De Servo Arbitrio*, LW 33:89, 97.

14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 159.

15 Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 4.

16 Ricoeur 2013, 4.

17 This critique of Husserl resembles that of Jacques Derrida, though without the latter’s reluctance toward the idea of originary moments that bear and unveil truth, e.g. *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak trans. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 10–18.

18 Ricoeur 2013, 144.

19 Ibid, 145. For Ricoeur, “Feuerbach a montré de façon décisive que l’achèvement d’une philosophie de la subjectivité, c’est l’athéisme,” from “La Révélation : Discussion D’Ensemble,” in *La révélation* (Bruxelles: Saint Louis, 1977), 207–236.

consciousness.”²⁰ To recognize the necessity of external testimony hermeneutically and epistemologically is not simply to impose a heteronomous authority, argues Ricoeur, but to open the imagination. It is to recognize our dependence as historical beings upon external persons and traditions for what we know and how we think. And it is through such external testimonies and revelations that we come to understand and know ourselves.

However, “reflection cannot produce this renouncing of the sovereign consciousness out of itself without contradicting itself. It can only do so by confessing its total dependence on the historical manifestations of the divine.”²¹ “The initiative belongs to historical testimony.”²² As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his Habilitationsschrift *Act and Being*, “the concept of revelation must, therefore, yield an epistemology of its own.”²³ We may say then that a general epistemology must yield its claim to establish the methodological terms on which theology is studied.²⁴ And we may extend this point to any purportedly scientific methodology that intends to say something unilaterally about the nature of theology. Rather, the method of theology must be born out of and serve its own subject matter.

But surely not all talk of revelation is equal. Indeed, while accepting Barth’s critique of liberal Protestantism, Bonhoeffer nevertheless pointed out many of the problems for a theology of revelation in *Act and Being*. He criticized problems with Barth’s earlier concept of revelation as the act of a divine Subject, for which revelation and faith become ahistorical.²⁵ He also critiqued the problems of a conservative construal of revelation as the objective doctrinal content of the church, or we may add those of a subjective mechanism of inspiration in the production of the Bible.²⁶ In contrast, drawing from Martin Heidegger’s fundamental ontology the insight that being precedes thought, Bonhoeffer argued that revelation is the *person* of Jesus Christ, who is a unity of God’s *act* and *being* for us, also existing as the church-community. In this way Bonhoeffer was able to affirm simultaneously that

20 Ricoeur 2013, 145.

21 Ibid, 150.

22 Ibid, 151.

23 DBWE 2:26.

24 “The Sorbonne, the mother of errors, has very incorrectly defined that truth is the same in philosophy and theology,” Martin Luther, *Disputation Concerning the Passage “The Word Was Made Flesh”* (1539), in LW 38:239–79. This in contrast to a unitive epistemology; see e.g. F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 50–58, 68–82.

25 “Those [human beings] to whom God is revealed are the very ones to whom God cannot become revealed . . . They would have to conceive of themselves as not existing in order to conceive the Word of God coming to them,” Karl Barth, *[Die christliche] Dogmatik* (1927), 1:287; cited in DBWE 2:94. The danger of a theology of consciousness is averted here, but “at the expense of the historicity of human beings and, hence, of the existential character of act” (DBWE 2:95). Rooted in the Reformed doctrine of the *finitum non capax infiniti*, the result of this conception is that “God’s freedom and the act of faith are essentially supratemporal” (DBWE 2:76–8). But if revelation has no ontological continuity in history, then neither can there be any real theological *knowledge*. See also Michael DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

26 DBWE 2:75–105.

the revelation of God is present for us immanently within history, as well as that this revelation, this person, remains free with respect to that history, and is not reducible to it. In other words, for Bonhoeffer, God has plunged into history in the person of Jesus Christ.

However, it may be objected that the incomprehensibility of God stands finally against any talk of revelation. After all, doesn't the idea of revelation make God somehow intellectually comprehensible for us? The tradition of apophaticism represented by Vladimir Lossky, for example, would prefer to speak, if at all, of divine energies rather than revelation.²⁷ Indeed, eastern theologians are right to point out and critique the Hegelian influence in much protestant theology of revelation, which ultimately desires to do away with the ineffability of God by conflating revelation with an Absolute Knowledge of God as pure thought, "attainable in pure speculative knowledge alone."²⁸ After all, Palamas saw Basil's distinction between the divine essence and energies to be necessary to affirm in light of the ineffability of God, seeking to tie the spirituality of the vision of God not to a sensible perception or an intellectual vision, but to *θέωσις* or divinization. Nevertheless, it is worth considering LaCugna's argument that the essence and energies distinction in the east may parallel the division of the economic and immanent Trinity in the west. LaCugna states:

The divine *ousia*, even though unknowable in itself, cannot be elevated beyond the divine persons. But in [Gregory of Palamas'] theology, since the divine *hypostases* belong to the supraessential, imparticipable essence of God, and since the energies, not the divine persons, enter into communion with the creature, Palamism widens the gap between *theologia* and *oikonomia* by postulating a divine realm comprised of essence and persons not directly accessible to the creature.²⁹

In the words of Aristotle Papanikolaou, the essence and energies distinction "may render the doctrine of the Trinity superfluous," since it is now the divine energies, rather than the persons of Christ and the Holy Spirit, that make God present and known to the human being.³⁰

In contrast to Basil's argument that we humans have knowledge of God only in God's energies, Christopher Beeley argues that "Gregory has a stronger doctrine of revelation."³¹ For Nazianzen, the incomprehensibility of God is precisely the presupposition of God's condescension to and illumination of us in the Trinitarian

27 Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, Ashley Moorhouse trans. (Aylesbury: Watson and Viney, Ltd.).

28 *Phē. Sp.* 192; Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J. B. Baillie (Digireads Publishing, 2009), 344.

29 Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Chicago: HarperOne, 1991), 192.

30 Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Sophia, apophysis, and communion: the Trinity in contemporary Orthodox theology," *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 249.

31 Beeley 2008, 303.

economy. Jesus Christ is the Light of Light, whom we see in the Light of the Holy Spirit.³² This illumination or revelation is not a knowledge of the divine essence or *οὐσία* as such, which remains always unknowable. But should we not say that revelation for Gregory is indeed a real knowledge of the *ὑποστάσεις*, the persons, in whom alone the divine *οὐσία* exists?

In the so-called *Five Theological Orations*, preached in the chapel of the Resurrection just prior to his troubled presidency at the council of Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianzus is dealing with opponents on two fronts. On the one hand, he is battling the "good" Nicenes about the *homoousion* of the Holy Spirit. On the other, he is responding to a new cadre of Arians, the radical Aetios and his secretary Eunomius. These later Arians went well beyond the original position of Arius, who taught that God the Father was transcendent and as such unknowable to the human being.³³ Since the Logos is a distinct *hypostasis* from the Father, and is derived from the Father, Arius reasoned that this Logos must have come into being at some point. In the words of Plato's *Timaeus*, "it isn't possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten."³⁴ For Arius, to posit the Logos as eternal would be to posit two unbegotten, "two self-sufficient first principles."³⁵

At least part of this argument of course invites a debate about the meaning of the term "begotten" when applied to God. It makes some sense then when Aetios and Eunomius sought to solidify its meaning by insisting in addition that words revealed essences. Since the term "begotten" is the opposite of "unbegotten," they reasoned that the *ousia* of the Father, who is "unbegotten," must be positively different from that of the Son, who is "begotten." Thus, these theologians defined God by the predicate: *that which is without origin* [*ἀγέννητος*]. Therefore, while Arius at least spoke of the divinity of the Son in some lesser sense, and of the ineffability of the divine *ousia*, for Eunomius this ineffability is denied. What was at stake? They were convinced that the revelation of essences by words was necessary to affirm in order to protect the possibility of theology and of the knowledge of God.³⁶ After all, if our language cannot directly apply to God, how then is theology even possible? As Luther would later say, they believed themselves able to peer into the invisible things of God.³⁷ Remarkably, Eunomius is even reported to have said that "God does not know (*ἐπίσταται*) anything more about his own essence than we do."³⁸

32 Ibid, 90–113.

33 Rowan Williams ascribed this fact to the Alexandrian influence upon Arius, in *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 143; Andrew Louth, on the other hand, ascribed this to the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*, a doctrine which Arius and his opponents shared, and which stood in contrast to a Neoplatonic optimism concerning the vision and knowledge of God, in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: from Plato to Denys* (New York: Oxford, 1981), 75–7; contra Williams, Christopher Stead argued against any significant Neoplatonic influence upon Arius, in "Was Arius a Neoplatonist?," *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997): 39–51.

34 Plato, *Timaeus*, 37d, Donald Zeyl trans.

35 Arius, from Opitz, U.6 = de syn.16, Epiphanius, haer. 69.7; in Williams 2002, 270–1.

36 Beeley 2008, 92; cf. Plato, *Cratylus*, 430a–431e.

37 Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 72–3.

38 *Frag. 2*, in Socrates, *HE* 4–7; in Beeley 2008, 92.

Gregory begins the first theological oration in a way evocative of Luther's polemic against the pride of reason:

I shall address my words to those whose cleverness is in words. Let me begin from Scripture: "Lo, I am against you and your pride" [Jer 50:31].³⁹

Gregory accuses his adversaries of mere "strife of words," with whom there is no rest from controversy. These "mere verbal tricksters" act as if theology is simply a game of human argument.

"[T]he great mystery" of our faith is in danger of becoming a mere social accomplishment [τεχνύδριον]. I am moved with fatherly compassion, and as Jeremiah says, "my heart is torn within me" [Jer 4:19]. Let these spies therefore be tolerant enough to hear patiently what I have to say on this matter, and to hold their tongues for a while—if, that is, they can—and listen to me.⁴⁰

"Discussion of theology is not for everyone."⁴¹ It is for the proper time and place, "whenever we are free from the mire and noise without," and for those "who have been tested and found a sound footing in study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul."⁴²

39 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 27.1.

40 *Ora.* 27.2.

41 *Ora.* 27.3.

42 Ibid. Purification or κάθαρσις is the removal what is impure, ἀναγνος, that which prevents us from our ascent to God in divine illumination (*Ora.* 28.2–3; Beeley 2008, 109). This platonic theme is interpreted biblically by Gregory, where purification is "a contrite heart and the sacrifice of praise (Pss 50.23; 51.29), and a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5.17), and the new person (Eph 4.24), and the like, as the Scripture loves to call it" (16.2; Beeley 2008, 87). Jesus Christ assumes and purifies human nature in the incarnation, applied to us individually in baptism (30.1, 38.7; Beeley 2008, 83–4). In this way, Gregory offers a complex synthesis of elements of the neo-platonic model of contemplative ascent assimilated to the Nicene orthodoxy of trinitarian descent. See John McGuckin, "The Vision of God in St. Gregory Nazianzen," *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997): 145–52. Purification is not a major theme in Luther's theology, and he replaces the *contemplatio* in the medieval practice of *oratio, meditatio, contemplatio* with *tentatio*, namely the suffering of the effects of God's powerful Word, at the heart of his theology of the cross; see Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way, Lutheran Quarterly Books*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Silcock and Mark Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). However, Luther does speak of purification in his *Sermons on the Gospel of St John*, where he distinguishes between two kinds of purification in parallel to the two kinds of righteousness, one which is imputed by the purity of Christ alone in baptism and the Word (i.e. Jn 15:3), and the other in which we grow in this life; the latter must grow from the former as works from faith (LW 22:426). In addition, purification is not for Gregory a strictly linear progression of human achievement, and he sharply criticizes the excessive rigorism of the Novatians on this score, a position praised by Melancthon (39.18; Beeley 2008, 88; Hall 2014, 99). So while there is a significant difference here, it should not prevent comparison. Where Gregory focuses on trinitarian descent, he and Luther are quite similar in their arguments, which is what I have chosen to focus upon in this paper. My orienting theme here is close to that of divine condescension in the works of J. G. Hamann; see John R. Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

Those people should listen to theological discourse "for whom it is a serious undertaking, [and] not just another subject like any other for entertaining small-talk."⁴³ As for Luther in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, so for Gregory, the *theologian* must first be addressed before theological discourse can begin.

Theology should be investigated as it is "within our grasp."⁴⁴ For one to engage in theology, one must approach "the mount . . . in eager hope matched with anxiety for [one's] frailty."⁴⁵ Gregory now attempts a direct contemplation of the divine essence as Eunomius claims to be possible. Soaring above the mount and the clouds, Gregory was utterly concentrated in himself, "detached from matter and material things."⁴⁶ Yet, still after all of this, he "scarcely saw the averted figure of God," like Moses taking shelter in the rock on Sinai as God passed by. Why does God deny Moses a direct vision of God's face? Likewise, Gregory states that "peering in I saw not the nature prime, self-apprehended . . . but as it reaches us at its furthest remove," namely in the majesty and grandeur "inherent in the created things [God] has brought forth and governs."⁴⁷

What can we know of God from this "furthest remove"? Are we not still dogged by philosophical paradoxes in even our most advanced understanding of the physical world today? Where does consciousness reside? Or one Gregory likes that is still valid: when was the beginning of time?⁴⁸ General relativity tells us there must be one. Was it in time, or before time? If in time, how can it be the beginning of time? But if time began before time, how then can it have happened before there was time? We could cite Kant's antinomies of pure reason here, or other strictly logical paradoxes, complicated ones such as Gödel's incompleteness theorems, or simpler ones such as the liar's paradox. We need hardly mention the mysteries of dark energy and dark matter, conceptual place holders for something about which we know essentially nothing. Now how can anyone think they understand the divine being when by our reason we barely understand ourselves and the creation? Scientific knowledge of the world merely "thinks out a rule and gets the title 'knowledge,'" such that it remains at the level from which it begins in common awareness or visual experience.⁴⁹ Thus it cannot penetrate into "things celestial" which have to do with ultimate or final causes.⁵⁰ Where properly regarded, however, scientific knowledge leads to "the dawning of awe."⁵¹ As Athanasius once famously argued, the lyre does not play itself.⁵² Mechanisms can always be explained away by other mechanisms, but beauty refuses such positivist reductionism. By this "dawning of awe" in the beauty and grandeur inherent in

43 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 27.3.

44 Ibid.

45 *Ora.* 28.2.

46 28.3.

47 28.3; cf. Augustine, *De Trin.*, XV, ch 7, § 13; ch 27, § 50.

48 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 29.9.

49 Ibid., 28.29.

50 28.28.

51 McGuckin 2001, 288.

52 *Contra Gentes* 38.4.

the creation, we may know *that* there must be some divine origin of things, but not *what* or *Who*.⁵³

Here Gregory is more critical of the analogy of nature than Augustine, perhaps as critical as Luther.⁵⁴ However, Gregory does not want us simply to abandon all reason in a form of fideism. Rather, like with a Buddhist koan, Gregory wishes for us to truly pursue reason tenaciously, so as to see that reason will only get us so far. As Nicolas of Cusa states in *On Learned Ignorance*, “it is evident that Philosophy (which endeavors to comprehend, by a very simple understanding, that the maximal Oneness is only trine) must leave behind all things imaginable and rational.”⁵⁵ However, since this is impossible for philosophy, the human being makes a final effort to try to *see*, to gain a direct mystical vision. But God refuses to grant this direct vision even to Moses. Meister Eckhart’s doctrine of the “little point” in the soul comes to mind here, where God throws the philosopher back in recognition of their creaturehood when finally attempting a direct vision of the divine ground, something at which D.T. Suzuki labors to reconcile with his own non-dualist views.⁵⁶ Gregory concludes: “Though every thinking being longs for God, the first cause, it is powerless, for the reasons I have given, to grasp him.”⁵⁷ As such, then, it is impossible to know God. Theology is impossible for the human being.

We may add to Gregory’s arguments the painful problem of theodicy. If God is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing, why then do such terrible things happen all the time? Please do not say “because freedom,” and so on. I would never give my child “freedom” to play in the street if he or she so chose, and then say when she was killed by a vehicle, “oh well, it was her choice.” By this I do not mean to advocate some form of determinism. Rather, I mean that the *analogy* doesn’t work, because we have an utterly asymmetrical relationship with God. Since no analogy is adequate, reason must fail to comprehend God directly, who apart from Christ is for us *deus absconditus*.⁵⁸ If on this sensitive subject I may speak of my own life, why would God allow my mother to be murdered when I was just a boy? Will we try to comfort ourselves by saying that perhaps God is not really all-powerful after all, in which case how can God be the creator of heaven and earth, or for that matter the savior? And off we go trying to peer into the invisible things of God. Writing on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, Gerhard Forde states:

Theologians, you might say, are like Sisyphus, condemned in Hades to rolling a huge stone up the hill, only to have it constantly roll back down. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Sisyphus was con-

53 Beeley 2008, 112; cf. Nazianzen, *Ora.* 28.6.

54 *Ora.* 31.8, 10; cf. Beeley 2008, 112; Forde 1997, 72–3.

55 *De Doc. Ig.* I, 10.29.

56 D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 79–89.

57 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 28.13.

58 McGuckin also describes Gregory’s position with this phrase in 1997, 149.

demned in that manner because he had discovered some of the secrets of Zeus!⁵⁹

One might advocate a form of negative theology in response to these problems. Since we cannot say what God is directly, we might rather study God’s essence indirectly by what God is not.⁶⁰ According to Gregory, however, the Eunoian definition is itself negative theology, and that’s part of the problem. It is a fundamentally *negative* definition—“not generated”—and thus it is not *knowledge*.⁶¹ Therefore, even as Gregory cannot deny such omni-predicates as omnipotence mentioned before, nevertheless, they do not actually say anything about God. “For what has the fact of owning no beginning, of freedom from change, from limitation, to do with [God’s] real, fundamental nature?”⁶² Gregory continues:

A person who tells you what God is not but fails to tell you what he is, is rather like someone who, asked what twice five are, answers “not two, not three, not four, not five, not twenty, not thirty . . . [etc. etc.]”⁶³

Now had Gregory known a thing or two about calculus and mathematical limits, he might not have used a mathematical illustration for this point, though it is well taken nonetheless. I don’t know my friend Lisa by saying not Charlie, not George, not Alex, not RJ, and so forth. Also, my dad is that which is without hair, and I am that which is without a job. All these are empty conceptual placeholders, mere rational projections, that really say nothing about who we are.

How then is knowledge of God possible if theology is impossible for the human being? Gregory gave us a hint in his earlier orations when he said that his partial vision of God was “sheltered by the rock, the Word that was made flesh for us.”⁶⁴ So we must turn to the mysterious activity of God in the trinitarian economy, and the testimony to it in the “grand and sublime language” of Holy Scripture.⁶⁵ Gregory states:

Faith rather than reason shall lead us, if that is, you have learned the feebleness of reason to deal with matters quite close at hand, and have acquired enough knowledge of reason to recognize things which surpass reason. If so, it follows that you will not be a wholly earthbound thinker, ignorant of your very ignorance.⁶⁶

59 Forde 1997, 74.

60 Thomas Aquinas, *Sum.* I, Q 3–12.

61 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 28.9; see also John Anthony McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: St Vladimir’s Press, 2001), 286.

62 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 28.9.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ora.* 28.3; Beeley 2008, 113.

65 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 29.17.

66 28.28.

For when we abandon faith to take the power of reason as our shield, when we use philosophical enquiry to destroy the credibility of the Spirit, then reason gives way in the face of the vastness of the realities. Give way it must, set going, as it is, by the frail organ of human understanding. What happens then? The frailty of our reasoning looks like a frailty in our creed. Thus it is that, as Paul too judges, smartness of argument is revealed as a nullifying of the Cross. Faith, in fact, is what gives fullness to our reasoning.⁶⁷

As Luther states, because people “misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things.”⁶⁸ If Gregory’s opponents had yet gained this more mature knowledge of “the frail organ of human understanding,” and we might add, of all of its hermeneutical and historical conditionality, then they would not have so quickly scorned the strange revelation of the crucified God.

Gregory in no way wishes to stop at apophasis. Like Origen before him, Gregory states that, as the human being Jesus Christ, “the Incomprehensible might be comprehended.”⁶⁹ The true theologian, for Luther, does not seek to penetrate into the invisible things of God through the creation, but instead remains with “what is visible of God” made manifest through the cross of Christ.⁷⁰ God is ontologically present for us in Jesus Christ, the icon and glory [κλέος] of the Father.⁷¹ Jesus Christ is the Logos of Theos *enhumanized*, God made visible.⁷² We should even say: *Jesus Christ is theology*, the knowledge of God. For the confession of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit *is* theology for Gregory.⁷³ Thus, while *theology* and *economy* are distinguished by Gregory, nevertheless theology is in this way “the fuller clarification, deepening, and extending of the meaning of the divine economy.”⁷⁴ For we “worship the Crucified,” Gregory says, God lifted up upon the cross.⁷⁵

67 29.21; cf. McGuckin 2001, 287–8.

68 LW 31:52; in Forde 1997, 78–9.

69 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 39.13; in Beeley 2008, 113.

70 Forde 1997, 71.

71 E.g. Col 1:15; D. A. Sykes explains that “The epic κλέος is made to answer to all the uses of the biblical δόξα, strengthening the εἰκὼν language in the same way as δόξα does in, e.g., Origen, *Jo.* 13. 25 (p. 249. 30, M. 14. 444A),” in Gregory, Claudio Moreschini, and D. A. Sykes, *Poemata Arcana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 97.

72 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 37.1–3; in Beeley 2008, 123, 141; see also Athanasius, *de Incarn.* 15.1–2, 16.1.

73 Beeley 2008, 194.

74 See Nazianzen, *Ora.* 38.8; in Beeley 2008, 195 and 201; thus the church fathers do not all divide the “economic Trinity” and the “immanent Trinity”; e.g. Karl Rahner, “Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam,” *Theological Investigations* 18 (London, 1984), 105–21; contra Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 171–2; but neither do they completely collapse them either; see McGuckin 2001, 309; on LaCugna’s tendency to collapse the economic and immanent Trinity, see also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 187–90. We must make the first, epistemological side of Rahner’s identification while qualifying the second; see Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, v 3 (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 13–17.

75 Nazianzen, *Let.* 101.5; ref. John 3.

Regardless of how similar or different our situation may be today, to continue to insist at this juncture on a form of theological skepticism is to once again divide the economic and immanent Trinity, to consider what God is “really like” to still be somehow inaccessible or unknowable to us, behind the veil of our intellectual, linguistic, or cultural conditionality. But this is simply to return to the initial point about God’s incomprehensibility and our own limits, which is in no way a refutation of God’s revelation in the Trinitarian economy, but rather the presupposition of it. Gregory is well aware that terms like “Trinity,” “*hypostasis*” and “*ousia*” are indeed human conceptual constructs, but they are nevertheless employed in service to the revelation of God the Father in the persons of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the words of Henri Bouillard,

History thus manifests at the same time the relativity of notions, of schemes in which theology takes shape, and the permanent affirmation that governs them. It is necessary to know the temporal condition of theology and, at the same time, to offer with regard to the faith the absolute affirmation, the divine Word that has become incarnate.⁷⁶

In service to that revelation, such terms and concepts are examples of faith giving fullness to reasoning, and as such are no longer reducible to human construction.⁷⁷ They have become a part of the grammar of the Church.⁷⁸ This is not to make a metaphysical claim anymore than a mythological one.⁷⁹ Gregory has already torn down the possibility of peering into invisible realities by pure speculative reason. Moreover, the “reality” to which I would refer us here is the world already reconciled in Jesus Christ.

In Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, the one not without the other. The reality of God is disclosed only as it places me completely into the reality of the world. But I find the reality of the world always already

76 Bouillard, *Conversion et grace chez S. Thomas d’Aquin: Étude historique*, *Théologie* 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 220–1; cited in *Knowledge of God*, trans. Samuel D. Fermiano (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969). Bonhoeffer’s view, to similar effect, is in contrast grounded in the contingent ontological continuity of the incarnation in an *analogia relationis* of Christ existing as community, rather than in an extension of the Thomist *analogia entis*.

77 See also Christopher Morse, “Raising God’s Eyebrows: Some Further Thoughts on the Concept of the *Analogia Fidei*,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 37 (Fall/Winter 1981–2): 1–2; for a Lutheran perspective on the distinction between primary and secondary theological discourse, see also Gerhard Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 135–90; as related to Nicene theology, see Charles Arand, Robert Kolb, and James Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 45–6.

78 Brian E. Daley, S. J., *Gregory of Nazianzus* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41; on Melancthon’s concept of the grammar of the church, see also Hall 2014, 61–5. Not therefore beyond all possible critique, yet irreducible to human construction.

79 See also Bayer 2007, 3–32.

borne, accepted, and reconciled in the reality of God. That is the mystery of the revelation of God in the human being Jesus Christ.⁸⁰

The Trinity is not a metaphysical theory that awaits putting into practice, but rather already *is* both God's act and being for us and for our salvation.

We truly know this Jesus Christ, the revelation of God, through the Spirit's ministry of word and sacrament in the church community.⁸¹ By these mysteries the full divinity of the Spirit is revealed as the spiritual meaning of Scripture.⁸² We truly hear the Spirit speaking through Scripture, the proclamation of the gospel, and the words of absolution. We are incorporated into this body of Christ by baptism, and we find our fulfillment as a Christian community in the holy eucharist. John Zizioulas takes a page from Bonhoeffer in the following, though without Bonhoeffer's tendency to neglect the Spirit:

When we make the assertion that [Christ] is the truth, we are meaning His *whole personal existence* . . . that is, we mean *His relationship* with His body, the Church, ourselves. In other words, when we now say "Christ" we mean a person and not an individual; we mean a relational reality existing "for me" or "for us." Here the Holy Spirit is not one who *aids* us in bridging the distance between Christ and ourselves, but he is the person of the Trinity who actually realizes in history that which we call [the Body of] Christ, this absolutely relational entity, Our Savior . . . The eucharistic community is the Body

80 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6:40.

81 Beoley 2008, 265; see also Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, "The Creed," art. 3; this not to the exclusion of concrete discipleship, e.g. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Burns and McDonagh (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 43; nevertheless, for Bonhoeffer, the justification of the sinner in Word and sacrament is God's *ultimate* Word over us and is the core of the revelation of Christ as the new human community of reconciliation in the forgiveness of sins; yet in order that that Word might actually be heard as gospel and that it might comfort, respect for the *penultimate* in this life in concrete obedience to Christ toward liberation of the oppressed is essential and is also God's Word; see Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6:137–145; for more on Gregory's understanding of the knowledge of God by the whole body of the church, see Daniel Opperwall, "Sinai and Corporate Epistemology in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus," in *Studia Patristica* 67 (2013): pp. 169–78; J. Jayakiran Sebastian is quite right then when he says that Gregory "would certainly acknowledge the reality of the involvement of the Trinity in the life of the people," in "Intertwined Interaction: Reading Gregory of Nazianzus amidst Inter-religious Realities in India," *A World For All? Global Civil Society in Political Theory and Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 171–2.

82 Gregory's hermeneutic here consists of extended typology that is often functionally equivalent to allegory along the lines of an Origenist model of a three stage progressive revelation; see Kristoffel Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla in Gregory Nazianzen*, *Lingua Patrum* II (Brepols, 1996), 249–86; see also Demoen "The Pradigmatic Prayer in Gregory Nazianzen," *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997): 101; see also Joseph Trigg, "Knowing God in the *Theological Orations* of Gregory of Nazianzus: the Heritage of Origen," *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, McGowan, Daley S.J., and Gaden, eds. (Boston: Brill, 2009), 83–104. This is the reason for Gregory's boldness in affirming the *ὑποούσιον* of the Spirit despite there being no letter of Scripture to directly prove it, something which Melanchthon is reluctant to acknowledge; see Hall 2014, 140.

of Christ *par excellence* simply because it incarnates and realizes our communion within the very life and communion of the Trinity . . .⁸³

As Bonhoeffer concludes *Life Together*,

The day of the Lord's Supper is a joyous occasion for the Christian community. Reconciled in their hearts with God and one another [through absolution and mutual consolation], the community of faith receives the gift of Jesus Christ's body and blood, therein receiving forgiveness, new life, and salvation. New community with God and one another is given to it. The community of the holy Lord's Supper is above all the fulfillment of Christian community. Just as the members of the community of faith are united in body and blood at the table of the Lord, so they will be together in eternity. Here the community has reached its goal. Here joy in Christ and Christ's community is complete. The life together of Christians under the Word has reached its fulfillment in the sacrament.⁸⁴

Through this ministry of word and sacrament, we not only worship, but are also actually taken into the very life of the Holy Trinity, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. For if I am baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit, who grafts me to Christ and divinizes me in baptism, so that by the Spirit I come to know God [Θεὸν ἔγνω], then surely the Holy Spirit is true God.⁸⁵ As Gregory concludes, "One links with the other, a truly golden chain of salvation."⁸⁶

For Gregory, the Trinity is not a collection of three instances of the same class or genre.⁸⁷ The unity of God the Holy Trinity resides in God the Father as the sole source of the Trinity and of the whole of the economy of salvation.⁸⁸ Contrary to some modern thinkers, the monarchy of the Father does not constitute subordinationism, since such an interpretation would again presume that being "unbegotten" is essential to the definition of the Divinity, the very position Gregory is always attacking.⁸⁹ The monarchy of the Father is what gives rise to the distinct identities of the three persons of the Trinity. This is by virtue of the manner in which the Father gives generation, in one case by manner of a "begetting", and the other by "procession," both equally mysterious and beyond our

83 John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's), 110–14.

84 DBWE 5:102.

85 See *Arcana* 3.15–16; Melanchthon considers this general argument of the Cappadocians to be conclusive; see Hall 2014, 139–40. Luther does not object to the language of "partaking of the divine nature," as we see in his commentary on 2 Pet 1.4, perhaps written in 1522; see LW 30:153–4.

86 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 31.28.

87 Beoley 2008, 306.

88 McGuckin 2001, 247.

89 Nazianzen, *Ora.* 31.9; Beoley 2008, 209; LaCugna 1991, 391; contra Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* v. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 334; on Luther's subscription to the monarchy of the Father, see WA 10.1:151.7–155.24, 183.13–186.8, cited in Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 113.

comprehension. This relation [σχέσις] defines the persons; their respective defining characteristic [ιδιότης] is their manner of generation, making them who they are. Thus, *hypostasis* for Gregory may be said to mean a non-accidental particular, personal subsistent entity or being with personal agency, who is distinguished by a characteristic relation to the Father. As Beeley concludes,

There are no abstract hypostases that exist apart from the divine nature that they share; there are only the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are unoriginate, begotten, and proceeding Divinity. Likewise, the divine nature does not exist apart from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are the Divinity.⁹⁰

Now if the divine *ousia* exists only as the *hypostaseis* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then we cannot bypass the thoroughly personal notions of sin and forgiveness for theology. In his 1535 *Commentary on Galatians*, Luther recognized this connection. In contrast to Jerome, he favors a literal interpretation when Paul says in Galatians that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written: cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.”⁹¹ Christ is not simply *punished* for the sins of the world, but rather accepts the actual guilt and the curse of the sins of the entire world, as if he himself had committed all sins. For God actually made him to *be* sin for us.⁹² Here Luther insists that we must read the church fathers in the light of Scripture. “Whatever sins I, you, and all of us have committed or may commit in the future, they are as much Christ’s own as if He Himself had committed them.”⁹³ Therefore, “in the same Person, who is the highest, the greatest, and the only sinner, there is also eternal and invincible righteousness.”⁹⁴ These two “come together and collide with such a powerful impact.”⁹⁵

[Sin], I say, attacks Christ and wants to devour Him as he has devoured all the rest. But [Sin] does not see that He is a Person of invincible and

90 Beeley 2008, 222.

91 Gal 3:13.

92 2 Cor. 5:21.

93 LW 26:278; Nazianzen has a notion of a “great exchange” that has some parallels with Luther’s, following from the principle that what was not assumed was not redeemed (*Let.* 101.3, 5; see also *Formula of Concord*, Ep., Art. VIII, affirm. thesis 10). When responding to the Eunoniam desire to subordinate the Son to the Father, Gregory comments on the same texts in Galatians and Corinthians: “No—look at this fact: the one who releases me from the curse was called “curse” because of me [κατάρτα ἤκουσε δι’ ἐμὲ]; “the one who takes away the world’s sin” was called “sin” and is made a new Adam to replace the old. In just this way too, as head of the whole body, he appropriates my want of submission [ἐμὸν ἀνυπότακτον ἑαυτοῦ ποιεῖται]. So long as I am an insubordinate rebel with passions which deny God, my lack of submission will be referred to Christ” (*Ora.* 30.5). So Christ is not only *called* sin and a curse for me, which is amazing in itself, but he actually makes my rebellion to be his own [ἐμὸν ἀνυπότακτον ἑαυτοῦ ποιεῖται].

94 LW 26:281.

95 Ibid.

eternal righteousness . . . Thus in Christ all sin is conquered, killed, and buried; and righteousness remains the victor and the ruler eternally.⁹⁶

The faith that alone justifies—trust [*fiducia*] for Luther, and not *fides acquisita*⁹⁷—is true worship that attributes divinity rightly to God. To trust completely in Christ, to have faith *in* Jesus, is to attribute total and complete divinity to him as the new human being through whom life and righteousness comes to humanity.⁹⁸

When Arius denied this, it was necessary also for him to deny the doctrine of redemption. For to conquer the sin of the world, death, the curse, and the wrath of God in Himself—this is the work, not of any creature but of the divine power.⁹⁹

Faith ascribes divinity to Christ as belonging *essentially* to him, and not accidentally.¹⁰⁰ Could this not shed a fresh perspective on Gregory’s use of the term “hypostasis” as an instance of faith giving fullness to reasoning? By defining divinity tautologically, the Arian position renders personhood an accidental characteristic of divinity, as does any attempt at a direct vision of the divine *ousia* apart from the *hypostaseis*. Yet, this is what we all attempt to do all the time, left to the devices of reason alone. For how can reason deduce the person? Isn’t it rather the case that the person must be revealed?

We come up against this Jesus Christ and attempt the usual academic process of the classification of objects. We try to understand this divine Logos from the human logos. We demand to know *how* this could be the case that God could take flesh and be revealed. We demand that this revelation be falsifiable by our own rational criteria.¹⁰¹ However, as Bonhoeffer points out, the constant asking of the “how” question shows that we are “chained to our own authority.”¹⁰² The sinner is trapped in its game of rational self-determination and self-justification. This is the heart curved in on itself, the condition of sin, which for Bonhoeffer is not the choice for evil, but rather the taking on of the knowledge of good and evil itself

96 Ibid.

97 i.e. Gal 3:1–3 and Rom 10:17.

98 Rom 3:26, 5:1–21.

99 LW 26:282.

100 Cf. in contrast E. P. Meijering, “The Doctrine of the Will and of the Trinity in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus,” *God Being History* (New York: American Elsevier, 1975), 110–11.

101 As Norris points out, “From Gregory’s viewpoint, it would always be odd to attack anything Arian with the narrow syllogistic arguments they so preferred. Too much modern theology has employed Arian methods to denounce Arian positions, a pyrrhic victory,” in “Gregory Nazianzus’ *Poemata Arcana*: A Poetic, Musical Catechism?,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 63 (2013): 74, n.46. So also Luther in the 1539 *Disputation*: “20. This is indeed not because of the defect of the syllogistic form but because of the lofty character and majesty of the matter which cannot be enclosed in the narrow confines of reason or syllogisms.” Thus, for theology we must learn “a new language in the realm of faith apart from every sphere,” (LW 38:239–79).

102 DBWE 12:283.

apart from God's Word.¹⁰³ As Bonhoeffer understood, like Luther before him, the claim to a knowledge of God by our own powers or abilities, and the claim to be able to do what is good by our own abilities, are two sides of the same coin.

Indeed this piety [of the knowledge of good and evil] was supposed to consist in humankind's going back behind the given word of God to procure its own knowledge of God. This possibility of a knowledge of God that comes from beyond the given word of God is humankind's being *sicut deus*; for from where can it gain this knowledge if not from the springs of its own life and being? Thus for their knowledge of God human beings renounce the word of God that approaches them again and again out of the inviolable center and boundary of life; they renounce the life that comes from this word and grab it for themselves. They themselves stand in the center.¹⁰⁴

CONCLUSION

To reclaim this center, God the Logos has taken flesh and fully entered history as the person of Jesus Christ. This means that there is such a thing as revelation, immanently present within the circle of our historical conditionality. As Christians, we truly know Jesus Christ, and thus truly know God, even if we are not always clear about *how* we know that we know this Jesus. Such is the task of a dogmatic reflection on the epistemological consequences of Trinitarian theology.

If there truly is such a thing as the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, then not all theology can be reduced to human construction. And if theology cannot be reduced to human construction, then dogmatics as a critical discipline of testing concerning sound teaching about that revelation is methodologically necessary to the discipline of theology.¹⁰⁵ In line both with this dogmatic principle and with the nature of hermeneutics, our method here has been neither that of the pure historical continuity of a *consensus antiquitatis*, nor that of an historicist gap or of a protestant leap over all church history and tradition in the name of *sola scriptura*.¹⁰⁶

103 Bonhoeffer and Nazianzen diverge quite drastically here. For Nazianzen, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil caused the fall only because it was partaken of too hastily—and rather represents the vision of God that is identical with $\theta\epsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$. See e.g. *Poemata Arcana*, 7.118–22. Still, even for Gregory we may say that “they grab it for themselves.”

104 Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:108.

105 See Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (New York: Continuum, 2009). Moreover, this epistemological consequence of Trinitarianism is an important reason for a Trinitarian *regula* for biblical hermeneutics. E.g. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 1.10.1; Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 31–2; Gadamer 2004, 176–7, 326–8; Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 156; James Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St Louis: Concordia, 2003), 219–29; see also Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

106 For more on Melancthon's theology of church history and of the authority of the early fathers, see Hall 2014, 53–66.

Our method here has rather been that of a *critical* historical continuity according to a dogmatic guideline, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

One of the early courses I was privileged to take at Union Theological Seminary in New York was on Dietrich Bonhoeffer with the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Professor of Theology and Ethics, Christopher Morse. This course gave me an important orientation as a young Lutheran at Union. His dogmatic approach to Bonhoeffer was shaped by his work on Barth, an approach that, though criticized by some Bonhoeffer scholars concerned to highlight the real theological differences Bonhoeffer had with Barth, is nevertheless justified because of their common affirmation of a theology of God's Word and revelation in contrast to a theology of consciousness. Through his courses and many discussions, I learned that dogmatics was not a rigid and backward discipline of simply repeating the formulas of the past, over which the adjective *systematic* was always to be preferred, but was indeed rather *the* critical task of Christian theology, by which we hold all things under the light of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God.

We cannot speak of the suffering God and then turn around and speak of all theology as mere human construction. There is a difference between “theology” as our academic or human discourse about God, limited though necessary, and that “Theology” or revelation of God that some of our concepts are made to serve. In the words of Catherine LaCugna:

By carefully qualifying the concept of God's ‘inner life’, and by making all metaphysical claims function directly with respect to the economy of salvation, a revitalized doctrine of the Trinity calls to account *all* theologies of God, it forces us to admit their partiality and inadequacy, and it requires that every interpretation of who God is be measured against what is revealed of God in the economy. The doctrine of the Trinity is in this sense not a teaching *about* God but the doctrine that specifies the conditions and criteria under which we may speak of God.¹⁰⁷

This is a matter not of our talk about God, but of God's condescension and revelation for us.

107 LaCugna 1991, 380.