The Eternal Generation of the Son: The Christological Significance for Origen and Nicaea

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The Lord created (ἔκτισέν) me the beginning of his ways for his works. Before he made anything, before the ages he established (ἐθεμελίωσέν) me. In the beginning before he made the earth, before the springs of waters came forth, before the mountains were settled, before all the hills he begets (γεννᾷ) me.

—PROVERBS 8:22–25 (LXX)[1]

The Christian faith confesses one God, Father, Son, and Spirit, and has traditionally spoken of the differentiation of the three divine persons (ὑπόστασεις) by means of the twin doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. The first of these is my concern in this essay. Maurice Wiles has noted the fact that the development of the doctrine of the eternal generation was "rougher and more circuitous than we have been inclined to imagine," and although his treatment is merely cursory, his contention is accurate.[2] Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–255) was the first to develop an explicit doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, but his reasoning entailed the correlation that creation existed eternally as well. As a result, the subsequent tradition had to wrestle with the implications of his understanding, and the Arian controversy led the church to develop and revise it considerably. The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son has proven contentious in our own time just as it was in the fourth century, and it has been abandoned by a significant number of evangelical theologians.[3] This reveals the need for greater engagement with and understanding of its roots in the Christian tradition. In response to this need, this article will attempt to answer the following question: what did the "eternal generation of the Son" mean for earlier (Origen) and later (Nicaea) Christology?

The exploration at hand will take shape in three parts. First, I will outline the development of the doctrine of the eternal generation in Origen and the resulting corollary of the eternal existence of creation. My focus will then turn to the later Alexandrian tradition and their unease with Origen's understanding. That will serve to introduce a discussion of Athanasius's doctrine of the eternal generation, focused especially on his distinction between being and will and on the properly christological orientation of his approach. Finally, I will describe the resulting impact of the doctrine on the Christology of Nicaea. Through this investigation, I will argue that, although Origen's treatment exhibits significant shortcomings, the doctrine of the eternal generation served for both earlier (Origen) and later (Nicaea) Christology as the biblically ordained language through which the church was enabled to speak truly about the unity and distinction of the Father and Son, securing the status of the Son as equal in divinity with the Father while differentiating the two in ways that upheld biblical revelation.

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Origen: Christ as the Eternally Begotten Wisdom of the Father

Maurice Wiles has argued that the original use of the concept of generation had less to do with the relationship between God the Father and the Son than with "the language already employed in the wisdom literature about God [begetting] his Wisdom."[4] Wiles cites Tatian, Theophilus, and Athenagoras employing the concept of generation without mention of sonship.[5] Most telling is a statement from Hippolytus: "Neither was the Word, prior to incarnation . . . , yet perfect Son, although he was perfect Word, *only-begotten*."[6] Wiles points out that "for him [Hippolytus] obviously only-begotten and Son are not logical synonyms."[7] This serves to illustrate that the concept is more complex than a simple correlation between human and divine parenthood, and that the roots of the concept of generation have more to do with the immutability of God than with the equality of the Son. As we will see, this largely holds true for Origen, whose consideration of the divinity of the Son is similarly focused on the concept of Wisdom, even as he develops the idea of "generation" into one of "eternal generation."

In order to understand the force of Origen's argument for the eternal generation of the Son, we must first briefly outline his doctrine of God. Origen connects ontology and epistemology and casts both in soteriological terms. For him, the basic affirmation is that God is not corporeal; he must be incorporeal spirit in order to be present with us.[8] Origen sets out this point in *De Principiis* 1.1.6, saying:

> God therefore must not be thought to be any kind of body, nor to exist in a body, but to be a simple intellectual existence, admitting in himself of no addition whatever, so that he cannot be believed to have in himself a more or a less, but is Unity (μόνας), or if I may so say, Oneness (ἑνας) throughout, and the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind.

Having established that God is not corporeal, Origen speaks of what God is, namely, oneness and mind. To these he adds that God is "he who is" (ὁ ὤν) from Exodus 3:14 and that God is good, citing Mark 10:18.[9] The notion of God's goodness is critical for Origen, as Widdicombe explains: "The one who is creator, the source of existence, and the one to whom we are to ascend must necessarily be perceived to be good. Origen's entire conception of the world . . . depends on the supposition that God is one and that he is good."[10]

It is in opposition to Marcionism that Origen develops his understanding of God as good and "he who is" and connects this with God as Father. According to Origen's portrayal in *De Principiis* 2.5, Marcion distinguished between the Creator God of the Old Testament, who is "just but not good," and God the Father of Christ, who is "a good God but not just."[11] Origen argues to the contrary that as "he who is," God is *being itself*.[12] Nothing has being by nature except the "First Principle," who is being and who gives being to everything that exists. Even the Son and the Spirit draw their being from the Father.[13]

In contrast to being, which is good, Origen argues that evil is "non-being" (οὐχ ὄν), and therefore the wicked are "those who are not" (see Exod. 3:14).[14] He brings together this citation from Exodus with the quotation from Mark 10:18: "No one is good but God the Father alone," to show the necessary interconnection of God's nature as being, as good, and as Father.[15] Thereby Origen counters Marcion's claim and affirms instead that the source of existence—the Creator—is the good God who is the Father of Christ. Origen also thus opposes those who claim that the Logos is responsible for creating evil—for being cannot create non-being—and attributes evil instead to "the free choice of rational creatures."[16] By equating goodness with being and evil with non-being, Origen collapses language of being and willing into each other. This tendency runs throughout his thought with particularly important implications for his doctrine of creation and his soteriology, to which we will return.

In the second chapter of *De Principiis*, Origen undertakes the task of identifying "what the only-begotten Son of God is," seeking to show how the generation of the Son can be compatible with his doctrine of God.[17] As John Behr has explained, Origen's analysis of the divinity of the Son is "basically exegetical": it is a consideration of biblical titles for the Son, focused above all on "Wisdom."[18] Origen argues that, as God's Wisdom, the only-begotten Son of God "could [not] possibly possess bodily characteristics," and must therefore be incorporeal.[19] In opposition to Valentinian Gnostics, he eschews the idea of bodily generation "similar to any human being," for that would imply a division in the divine substance.[20] Rather, the Son's generation is an "exceptional process, worthy of God, to which we can find no comparison, . . . an eternal and everlasting begetting, as brightness is begotten from light."[21] Further, for Origen, integral to incorporeality and immutability is eternity: "Time applies to the realm of becoming, not being."[22] Therefore, the Son must be incorporeal and eternal, begotten not in the sense of human begetting, but as an eternal brightness begotten from light.

Origen is concerned to clarify the implications of this understanding for the doctrine of God, and it is ultimately the logic of these implications that underlies his argument for the eternal generation of the Son. Having established that the Son is the Wisdom of God, Origen asks, "And can anyone who has learned to regard God with feelings of reverence suppose or believe that God the Father ever existed, even for a single moment, without begetting this wisdom?"[23] Such a supposition would seem to entail that God might be unable or unwilling to generate his Son, which "as everyone can see, is absurd and impious," and therefore "we recognize that God was always the Father of his only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of him and draws his being from him, but is yet without beginning."[24] Henri Crouzel has pointed out that "eternity" is not a clear notion in Origen's thought; αἰών and αἰώνιος sometimes refer to a long time, sometimes to a time without beginning or end.[25] However, Origen is clear that his understanding of eternity here is of that which is beyond time, completely outside of its constraints.[26]

In consideration of a passage from Wisdom of Solomon 7:25–26, which describes wisdom as an "emanation of the clear glory of the almighty," Origen says that God cannot be called almighty "if there are none over whom he can exercise his power. Accordingly, to prove that God is almighty [παντοκράτωρ] we must assume the existence of the universe."[27] Georges Florovski has pointed out the significance of Origen's use of the word παντοκράτωρ, borrowed from the LXX, which—unlike the English "almighty" or Latin *omnipotens*—conveys "not just a capacity but the actualization of capacity."[28] More importantly, given Origen's tendency to conflate ideas of being and will, he sees a progression from not exercising power to exercising power as necessarily a progression in *being*.[29] In other words, if there were a time when creation did not exist, then God would have experienced an ontological progression when creation came to exist, which cannot be so. This means that God is not omnipotent unless all things (τὰ πάντα) also existed from all eternity; there is not, therefore, a firm distinction for Origen between generation and creation: "Both are necessary eternal relations intrinsic to Divine being."[30]

However, Origen's understanding here is carefully nuanced. As we have seen, the relation between the Father and the Son is tied to the relation between God and creation by the logic of the willing/able argument— if creation or the Son ever did not exist,

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then God was either unwilling or unable to be fully himself as Father or as almighty. However, Origen also says that implicit in Wisdom was "every capacity and form of creation that was to be," so that the Son contains "the beginnings and causes and species of the whole creation."[31] So the Father/Son and Creator/creature relations are connected in that creation is said to be present within Wisdom: "In this Wisdom . . . the Creation was always present in form and outline."[32] In this way, Origen is able to attribute a metaphysical priority to the Father/Son relationship, for the existence of creation is dependent on the existence of the Son. As Widdicombe explains, "The idea of eternity, then, does not itself distinguish the relation of the Father and Son from that of the Father and creation. But Origen is certain that the two relations are distinct."[33] There are not, therefore, other "eternal principles" besides the "First Principle," as Origen's critics would inevitably accuse him of implying.

In addition to the distinction in priority between the two relations, Origen also sees a distinction in quality: there is a significant contrast between the relationship of Father and Son and that of Lord and servant. This is central to Origen's soteriology, in which he explains that by the "Spirit of adoption" we come to saving knowledge of God through the Logos and thereby progress from the status of servants to the status of adopted sons.[34] We who are sons by adoption share in the life of him who is Son by nature; we who know God as Lord come to know God as Father.[35] This is a progression Origen describes elsewhere as one from non-being to being, or from evil to moral purity. This is a Middle-Platonist cosmology radically recast and reworked in biblical terms. As Widdicombe says, "As creation arises from the Father-Son relation, so it returns to share in that relation."[36]

Although Origen's treatment of eternal generation is pioneering and significant, a number of troubling issues become critical for those who came after him. As Colin Gunton has pointed out, the concept of generation is still primarily linked with Wisdom for Origen, evidencing a preference for rational over personal categories.[37] In addition, we have seen that Origen does not distinguish clearly between categories of being and will, so that the actualization of potentialities such as goodness or authority is understood in ontological terms. Finally, Origen is still much more focused on the immutability of God than on the equality of the Son, failing to allow the Father-Son language fully to impact his Christology.

The Alexandrian Tradition in Critique of Origen

Without getting into all of the complexities of the theological debates of the third and fourth centuries, it is worth noting at this point some of the general contours of discussion in the period as it relates to Origen's thought and the doctrine of the eternal generation.[38] As Rowan Williams has shown, "the most widely expressed dissatisfaction about Origen's teaching had to do with a particular area of his teaching: cosmology and anthropology."[39] Dionysius of Alexandria (d. c. 264), critical of Origen's teaching on the pre-existence of souls, picked up much of Origen's Trinitarian theology.[40] However, he made the connection between generation and the relationship of Father and Son—rather than Father and Wisdom—explicit in a way Origen did not.[41] He also made use of the third-man argument to insist that matter cannot be unoriginate (ἀγεννησία), only God can.[42] However, he did not yet speak of creation from nothing; that came with the writings of Methodius of Olympus (ca. 250–311).[43] Methodius, one of the strongest critics of Origen pre-Nicaea, appealed to God's perfection and unchangeability to argue that God would be imperfect if he ever needed something outside himself to be what he is (i.e., if he needed creation in order to be almighty).[44] He also argued that God creates through his bare will and does so "out of nothing."[45] As a result of this, Methodius bequeathed to the tradition a firm Creator/creature distinction, which would become immensely important in the Arian controversy.

Arius (ca. 256–336) rejected both Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation and his doctrine of the eternity of creation. In doing so, he made much use of Methodius's critique. Arius extended Methodius's basic argument to attribute the concept of generation to God's will (rather than to his being), because he saw "Fatherhood" as an aspect of divine will, rather than divine being.[46] Therefore, Christ was created by God's will, *ex nihilo*, according to Arius, which tells us important things about how God chooses to create—he chose to create Christ as Son—but it does not reveal anything about divine nature. Arius largely ignored the concept of Fatherhood and focused on establishing God alone as ingenerate, the sole source of all things.

With the abandonment of Origen's doctrine of the pre-existence of souls/creation, and with the use of Methodius's argument for the distinction between being/will and Creator/creature, the stage was now set for Athanasius (ca. 296–373) to respond to Arius and provide the first ever "explicit and systematic analysis" of the concept of God's Fatherhood and his relation to the Son.[47] The fundamental difference between the theology of Athanasius and that of Origen is the dissimilar cosmological assumptions underlying their thought. Origen divided reality into spirit and matter, while Athanasius followed Methodius in the division of reality between the divine and that which was created out of nothing.[48] For Athanasius, the clear distinction between Creator and creature means that "all originate things are to be thought of as ontologically the same, relative to the unoriginate."[49] Mapped onto this distinction is the division between οὐσία (being) and δύναμις (will): the former refers to God himself, the latter to God's expression of himself to that which is external to him.[50] Therefore, the question for Athanasius was whether the Son is generated from the being of God or brought into existence out of nothing by the will of God.[51]

Athanasius's most sustained discussion of Fatherhood in *Contra Arianos* responds to two criticisms: that the equality of the Son with the Father makes them brothers and that eternal generation teaches two unoriginate entities.[52] Athanasius responds with a discussion of theological epistemology in which he argues for the priority of the term "Father" over the term "ingenerate." He says that the Arians, like the Greeks, perceive God through created things and thus call him ingenerate. However, it is "more pious and accurate to signify God from the Son and call him 'Father.'"[53] As a result of this, Athanasius sees the Arian threat to the divinity of the Son as a threat to God's status as Father, for Fatherhood is central to the nature of divinity.[54]

In light of these hermeneutical concerns, Athanasius begins his refutation of the Arian claims. The Arians employed Origen's logic to argue that the eternal Fatherhood of God necessarily includes the corollary of God being eternally Creator. However, Athanasius sees that, in the context of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, a different kind of correlation exists between Creator and creature than between Father and Son. "A work is external (ἔξωθεν) to the one who makes it, as has been said, but the Son is the proper offspring of the being (ἴδιον τῆς οὐσίας γέννημα)."[55] Athanasius accepts the argument from the logic of relation, which states that "the relation between two correlative entities must be a relation of being," and applies it to the Father/Son relationship.[56] However, with reference to the correlation between Creator and creature, he views this relation of will as a "linguistic correlativity": a correspondence between a pair of words which does not imply a correlation in being. He therefore

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rejects the corollary between God as Father and as almighty. As we saw above, underlying Origen's argument for the eternal existence of creation is a concern to show that God eternally realizes his goodness. For Athanasius, however, God does not need anything external to himself to realize his goodness, for it finds full expression in the eternal relationship of love between Father and Son.[57] Therefore, as Widdicombe explains, it is ultimately "this conception of the being of God as an act of eternal giving and responding that allows Athanasius to distinguish the relation of the Father and the Son decisively from that of God and the created order."[58]

Returning to the two criticisms mentioned above, we can see that the Father and Son cannot be brothers in Athanasius's account because Fatherhood and Sonship are integral to what divinity is. It is a category mistake to try to apply the logic of transitory human familial relations to the Godhead; we must let God define the terms used of him. Second, there are not two unoriginate entities, because the Son shares in the one being of the Father. As the "proper offspring" of the Father's being, the Son is eternally dependent upon and integral to the being of the Father who is the fount of divinity.[59] It is through the Son that God creates, and this includes the creation of time, which is why, Athanasius argues, the Bible never uses temporal terms to describe the Son.[60] The Son is eternal; there was never a time when he was not; he has no beginning to his existence.[61]

Athanasius is insistent that because the Son shares in the divine being of the Father, he is able to save. And it is through the incarnation that the way is opened for us to become sons by adoption: "From the beginning we are creatures by nature and God is our creator through the Word, but afterwards we are made sons and henceforth God the creator becomes our Father also."[62] Through baptism we receive the Spirit of adoption, and although we remain creatures by nature, we become sons by the grace of adoption.[63] Origen, lacking

the sharp Methodian distinction between Creator and creature, spoke of our original condition in psychological and relational terms with less emphasis on the concept of creaturehood. Athanasius was much more clear in maintaining the ontological distinction and keeping the Son on the divine side while we remain on the side of creatures, even as we come to share in the divine life of the Godhead through the Spirit.

This understanding of the Father-Son relationship ultimately reinforces Athanasius's understanding of the incarnation as divine revelation. Both Origen and Arius believed that the Son's knowledge of the Father is less than the Father's own self-knowledge. By contrast, Athanasius says that as a result of his sharing in the divine nature, the Son has comprehensive knowledge of the Father, and that therefore "the Father's Godhead is contemplated in the Son."[64] This allows biblical language to exert greater authority in his Trinitarian doctrine and results in a more robust affirmation of the Son's proper divinity. Having relocated the doctrine of eternal generation more fully within the Father-Son relationship, as opposed to the God-Wisdom relationship, and having distinguished more consistently between categories of being and will, allowing for a more balanced focus on both the immanent and economic Trinity, Athanasius secures Christ's unique place on the divine side of the ontological divide between Creator and creature. As a result, Athanasius's development of the doctrine of eternal generation is able to function fruitfully to describe the self-giving love that characterizes the mutual relations between the first two persons of the Godhead.

The Christology of Nicaea
The theology of Athanasius was immensely influential in the formulation of the council of Nicaea in 325, and his distinctive stamp remains on the final form of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed formulated in 381. The opening words "I believe in God the Father Almighty [παντοκράτορα]" remind us of Origen's question of the actualization

of God's omnipotence, an actualization that Athanasius believed was a function of God's will, rather than his being.[65] The first clause also reflects the prominence of the confession that God is Father and of Athanasius's decisive insistence that Fatherhood is integral to divinity.[66] Speaking of Christ, the creed says:

> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten (μονογενῆ) Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (πάντων τῶν αἰώνων), God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten (γεννηθέντα), not made (ποιηθέντα), being of one essence with the Father (ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί); by whom all things (τά πάντα) were made (ἐγένετο).[67]

The first words of the second article, "one Lord Jesus Christ," affirm the oneness of Father and Son: faith in Christ is faith in the one God. Μονογενῆ (only-begotten) affirms the unique status of Christ's Sonship: although we may become sons by adoption, he alone is Son by nature. Πάντων τῶν αἰώνων: the Son is begotten eternally, begotten "before all worlds." The Nicene fathers intentionally avoided the use of χρόνος (time), but we nonetheless see the affirmation that the Son is begotten before time existed, for it is in and through the Son that time itself was created. In opposition to the Arian slogan "there was when he was not," the Creed affirms that the Son shares eternally in the being of God: eternal Son, eternal Father.

"Light of Light" picks up on the imagery of the sun and its rays used by Origen and Athanasius as a metaphor for the eternal and continual generation of the Son.[68] The Arians originally agreed to formulas such as "of God" or "from God," but they meant "from God" by an act of his will. For that reason, the formulation from 325 said "only-begotten, that is, from the being of the Father." In tidying up the wording, the Council of Constantinople saw the use of ὁμοούσιον (of one substance) to be sufficient to convey that same meaning.

The council affirmed that Christ is not made (ποίημα), for God created all things (τά πάντα) *ex nihilo* as a function of his will—rather than of his being—and he did so by his eternally begotten Word, who shares in his being (ὁμοούσιον). This provides an explicit identification of the Son with the Creator, against Marcion.[69] The creed goes on to say, "Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate . . . " and recounts the details of the life, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Christ, connecting the eternal Trinity with the revealed Trinity and pointing to the revelatory and soteriological significance of the incarnation that was so central to Athanasius's theology. Eternal generation functions as the controlling analogy to affirm both the unity and distinction of the first two persons of the Godhead, infusing the ontological categories with relational reciprocity and love that reflects the biblical witness to God's triune being.

Attached to the creed was a canon declaring anathema "those who say 'there was when he was not', and 'Before being begotten he was not', and that 'He came into existence out of nothing'; or who allege that the son of God is of a different . . . being [οὐσία], or that he is created, or changeable or alterable."[70] This reveals even further how central the debate between Arius and Athanasius was for the council and how decisive was Athanasius's response. Given the belief of the council that it was explicating the truth already present in the Scriptures and present in the faith of the Catholic Church, it also becomes clear that it was not simply Athanasius's logical arguments, but his faithfulness to the Word of God and to the apostolic faith of the church that secured the place of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son at the centre of orthodoxy. So Athanasius said that at Nicaea the church fathers "wrote not what seemed good to them but what the Catholic Church believed. Hence they confessed how they had come to believe, in order to show that their opinions were not novel but apostolical, and that what they wrote down was

no invention of their own, but the same as was taught by the apostles."[71]

Conclusion

Christoph Schwöbel writes that in the New Testament "new identifying descriptions for the God of Israel are introduced in which the story and destiny of Jesus becomes the focus for God's self-identification."[72] As a result, christological titles come to be understood as statements about the being and action of God. Schwöbel continues:

> This also explains why Jesus's addressing God as the Father and the church's invocation of Jesus as the Son could become the paradigm for the use of all other Christological models, since the Father-Son relationship exemplifies the mutuality and reciprocity of God's self-identification in Jesus and the identification of Jesus through his relation to God.[73]

As we have seen, this is precisely the meaning of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son for both earlier (Origen) and later (Nicaea) Christology. However, Origen's treatment of the eternal generation ultimately fails to secure the unique status of the Son in relation to the Father. It also tells us much less about the character of the inter-Trinitarian relations and the epistemological significance of the incarnation.

From the earliest years, Christians have struggled to grasp the implications of the words used of God in Scripture. Analogical language is fraught with peril because of the shifting implications that result from its use in different philosophical contexts. Origen believed that God revealed himself as Father, and he believed that the affirmation of Christ as the Son of God relates to his share in the divinity of the one God. Interestingly, very little discussion takes place in the early church about the relation between sonship and Davidic kingship as found in the Torah. Nonetheless, because of what he learned from the Torah, Origen believed that only God himself could bring salvation to his

people. Origen bequeathed to his successors a number of complicated questions regarding the relation in God between being and will, the origin of created things, and the relation between the eternal triune God with the revealed incarnate God in Christ. Athanasius provided the clearest and most decisive response to these questions and placed the doctrine of eternal generation at the centre of the church's speech about the triune God. He believed, and the Nicene fathers with him, that eternal generation is the biblically ordained analogy that allows us to speak truly about the unity and distinction of the Father and Son. It reveals to us the mutual reciprocity and love of their eternal relations and shows that God can eternally actualize his goodness without the need for the eternal existence of something outside of himself. It also reveals the beauty of our adopted sonship, by which we share in that relationship with the Father in the Son, through the Holy Spirit. "Therefore God the Word Himself is Christ from Mary, God and Man; not some other Christ but One and the Same; He before ages from the Father, He too in the last times from the Virgin. . . . To Him be the adoration and the worship, who was before, and now is, and ever shall be, even to all ages. Amen."[74] **X**

Notes

1 As quoted in Origen, *De Principiis*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Harper & Row, 1973), 15. Henceforth *DP*. Scripture translations are from Origen (usually quoting the LXX) unless otherwise noted.

2 Maurice F. Wiles, "Eternal Generation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 12 (1961): 284.

3 These include Millard Erickson, Wayne Grudem, Paul Helm, J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, and a number of others. See discussion in Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 29–32.

4 Wiles, *Eternal Generation*, 285, citing especially Prov. 8:25 and Ps. 110:3, LXX; we may add Wisdom of Solomon 7:25.

5 For example, Tatian writes, "And by His simple will the Logos springs forth; and the Logos, not coming forth in vain, becomes the first-begotten work of the Father." Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graeciae*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 5.

6 Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum* 15, quoted in Wiles, *Eternal Generation*, 285. Emphasis added.

7 Wiles, *Eternal Generation*, 285.

8 This comes through most clearly in Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 13–32*, trans. Ronald Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 13.143 (p. 98). Henceforth *Com. Jn.* He is arguing against the Stoics.

9 *DP* 1.2.13 (p. 27).

10 Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 26.

11 *DP* 2.5.1 (p. 101).

12 Origen says elsewhere that God transcends mind and being, largely in connection with his discussion of the quotation in Plato's *Republic* 509B: "The Good is not the same thing as being, but even beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power." However, as Widdicombe has illustrated, "Origen would not have seen a tension between the statement that God is 'he who is' and the statement that God 'transcends mind and being.'" Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 43.

13 *DP* 1.2.2 (p. 15). To be sure, Origen holds that the Son and the Spirit do not draw their being from the Father in the same way that we do.

14 *Com. Jn.* 2.94–95 (p. 119).

15 *Com. Jn.* 2.96 (p. 119).

16 For greater detailed analysis of this argument, see Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 25–35.

17 *DP* 1.2.1 (p. 15). The significant problem must be noted, if not dealt with in any depth here, that much of the surviving text of *DP* is the Latin translation of Rufinus who, by his own admission, felt at liberty to make certain alterations (see Rufinus, pref. to *DP*, lxii). As a result, the authenticity of particularly anti-Arian or pro-Nicene statements in the text of *DP* is questionable but is not to be finally determined herein. See further discussion in Ronnie J. Rombs, "A Note on the Status of Origen's *De Principiis* in English," *Vigiliae christianae* 61 (2007): 21–29.

18 John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, vol. 1 of *The Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 191. Origen's argument that the Son is the Wisdom of God is based primarily on Prov. 8:22–25, Col. 1:15, and 1 Cor. 1:24, the last of which speaks of "Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God" (ESV).

19 *DP* 1.2.2 (p. 15). This is not a rejection of the incarnation; Origen is focused here on the divine, rather than the human nature of Christ.

20 *DP* 1.2.4 (p. 17).

21 *DP* 1.2.4 (p. 18).

22 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 68.

23 *DP* 1.2.2 (p. 15). This illustrates Ronald Heine's contention that Wisdom is a more fundamental concept in Origen's Christology than *Logos*, which places Origen firmly in the tradition of Alexandrian Jewish and Jewish-Christian wisdom speculation (*Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2010], 93). However,

we must note the strikingly anti-Arian tone of this statement, which may indicate that it comes from Rufinus rather than Origen.

24 *DP* 1.2.2 (p. 16). Origen says God's wisdom does not have a temporal, ontological, logical, or any other kind of beginning we can imagine.

25 Henri Crouzel, *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 187.

26 Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, trans. John Clark Smith (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 92.

27 *DP* 1.2.10 (p. 23).

28 Georges Florovsky, "St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation," in *Aspects of Church History*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 43.

29 *DP* 1.2.10 (p. 23). Origen says, "Thus God will apparently have experienced a kind of progress, for there can be no doubt that it is better for him to be almighty than not to be so."

30 Florovsky, "St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation," 43.

31 *DP* 1.2.2 (p. 16).

32 *DP* 1.4.4 (p. 42).

33 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 75.

34 *Com. Jn.* 32 (368–75). Again, we see the conflation of epistemology and ontology, and of being and will, all cast in soteriological terms.

35 Ibid.

36 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 119.

37 Colin E. Gunton, "And in One Lord Jesus Christ . . . Begotten Not Made," *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001): 262. However, Origen's treatment does infuse the rational categories with personal meaning and significance. Gunton also argues that Origen fails to guarantee the uniqueness of the Son, and only ensures his eternity. However, Widdicombe's core thesis is the continuity of Origen's thought with Athanasius rather than with Arius, and he proves this, as we noted above, by showing that Origen does, at least in part, guarantee the uniqueness of the Son in a way that Arius later failed to do. Origen simply does not do so by way of *eternity*, but through the ontological priority of the Father-Son relationship. Therefore, his doctrine only fails to secure the uniqueness of the Son when appropriated into a different cosmological framework (Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 4).

38 I focus here on specific voices in the Alexandrian tradition to help illuminate Athanasius's thought in the following section. I therefore necessarily leave out numerous important theologians including Theognostus, Amphilocius, Didymus, Ambrose, and Hilary. Cf. discussion in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), esp. 191–230.

39 Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 154. It is important to acknowledge that these two paragraphs necessarily present an oversimplification of a number of complex

and nuanced theological conversations. See further Williams, *Arius*, esp. 149–175.

40 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 202–3.

41 Dionysius, "Refutation and Defence," in *Letters and Treatises*, trans. C. L. Feltoe (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 2.104 (p. 101).

42 Williams, *Arius*, 150. The third-man argument says that ascribing "unoriginateness" to matter and to God necessitates a third "older and higher than both" to account for their "unoriginateness."

43 Creation out of nothing is present in some form as early as Irenaeus: "There is one God Almighty, who created all things through his word. He both prepared and made all things out of nothing" (*Against Heresies*, 1.22.1). But it is not explicated with much detail until Methodius.

44 Methodius, *De Creatis* 3, in *The Writings of Methodius, Alexander of Lycopolis, Peter of Alexandria, and Several Fragments* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 179.

45 Methodius, *De Creatis* 4 (p. 180). He refers to God's "rest" on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2) to argue for this distinction between being and will. God does not stop being fully God when he rests, because that is a function of his will. See discussion in Vladimir Cvetkovic, "From Adamantius to Centaur: St. Methodius of Olympus' Critique of Origen," in *Origeniana Decima*, Biblioteca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011): 791–802.

46 Rowan Williams, "The Logic of Arianism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1983): 61.

47 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 145.

48 Athanasius does not employ the third-man argument here but simply points to the limit to God's power implied by a dependence on something other than himself in order to create. Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1886), 1.21.56 (p. 691). Henceforth *CA*.

49 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 151. This is in opposition to Arius's contention that the Son can be a creature, but not like one of the creatures. Athanasius says that is an invalid qualification, for all creatures share the same ontological position: there can be no intermediaries.

50 Florovski, "Athanasius' Concept of Creation," in *Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 51. We see here the roots of the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity.

51 It is also helpful to note the different polemical contexts of Athanasius's and Origen's writing: Origen was responding primarily to Marcion and other Gnostics of his time, while Athanasius was writing in opposition to Arius.

52 *CA* 1.14 (p. 682); *CA* 1.30 (p. 701). The three central errors of the Arian understanding of the Son, according to Athanasius, are that "there was [a time]

when he did not exist"; that "before he was brought into being, he did not exist"; and that the Son "came into existence out of nothing." *CA* 1.5 (pp. 671–72).

53 *CA* 1.34 (p. 704).

54 *CA* 1.28 (p. 698). Athanasius also points out that "God does not make man his pattern" and that God's being defines what Fatherhood truly is. Athanasius is the first to quote Ephesians 3:15 in connection with God's Fatherhood: "of him is every father in heaven and on earth named."

55 *CA* 1.29 (p. 700).

56 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 180.

57 He does not unpack this fully in the context of *CA* 1.29, but he returns to it in *CA* 3.59–67 (pp. 889–99).

58 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 186–87.

59 *CA* 3.6 (p. 834).

60 *CA* 1.13 (p. 681). He cites as proof John 1:3, Heb. 1:2, and Ps. 145:13.

61 *CA* 1.12 (p. 680).

62 *CA* 2.59 (p. 803).

63 *CA* 3.33 (p. 863). As a result, the Sonship of Christ is still unique, for he is Son by nature. For discussion of Athanasius's use of ἴδιος in relation to the Son as distinct from our own sonship, see Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 188–206.

64 *CA* 3.5 (p. 834). Athanasius grounds this in his exegesis of John 14:10, 10:38, and 14:9.

65 Philip Schaff, "Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum," in *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), 58.

66 This becomes more significant when we recognize that, had the council followed Arius, this clause would likely read "I believe in God the sole ingenerate source of all."

67 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 59.

68 Athanasius writes, "The whole being of the Son belongs to the Father's substance, as radiance from light, and stream from source; so that he who sees the Son sees what belongs to the Father; and knows that the Son's being is in the Father just as it is from the Father. For the Father is in the Son as the sun is in its radiance, the thought in the word, the source in the stream" (*CA* 3.3, [p. 831]). Cf. John Anthony McGuckin, "The Trinity in the Greek Fathers," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 64.

69 Cf. Athanasius, *CA* 1.9.

70 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 60.

71 Athanasius, *De Syn*, quoted in Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 115.

72 Christoph Schwöbel, "Christology and Trinitarian Thought," in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 123.

73 Ibid., 124.

74 *CA* 4.36 (p. 928).