

Pancreation Lost: The Fall of Theology

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I. The Doctrine of Creation

The most fundamental divide in all reality is that between God the Creator and creatures. From the biblical point of view, everything other than God is a creature of God. But before proceeding to explicate this further, and to argue that this doctrine has been compromised in the prevailing western theological tradition, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of “created” for there are at least three senses in which something, X, can be said to be created. The first is that there was a time when X did not exist and a point at which it began to exist. In this sense someone can be said to have created₁ a riot by throwing a Molotov cocktail. There was no riot up to that point and a riot began at that point. The second sense is that X is the creation of some cause when it is ontologically distinct from that cause. Thus the riot spoken of would be created₁₂ by the person who threw the cocktail: it both had a beginning in time and was a reality distinct from the person who created it. The last of the three senses is that X is created₃ if its existence depends on some cause. This is the most fundamental sense, since dependency is a necessary element of the other two. Let’s now briefly consider these distinctions with respect to God’s relation to the cosmos so as to illustrate their application.

Since the NT says three times that God existed “before all time” (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Jude 1:25), the cosmos is uncreated in the first sense. It did not have a beginning *in* time; rather, time is a feature of the created cosmos. This does not affect the fact that the cosmos is created in the second sense and is a distinct reality from God, or that it is created in the third sense since it is continuously dependent on God. By contrast, God’s own actions within the cosmos in relation to creatures would be created₁ but uncreated₂. That is, they would each have a beginning in time but would not be distinct realities from God. They would also be created₃, of course, since they would depend entirely upon God’s performing them. To sum up: whatever is uncreated₁ has no beginning in time, whatever is uncreated₂ is not distinct from its cause, and whatever is uncreated₃ has unconditionally non-dependent existence.

In all that follows, I will be at pains to specify at every point which of the senses of “created” or “uncreated” is being discussed, affirmed, or denied. This will be crucial, since I will be arguing that a fundamental difference between the dominant western theological tradition and the Orthodox tradition is the sense and scope of the biblical teaching that God created “all things.” For that reason I now begin by examining some of the biblical texts that are central to that doctrine.

A. Pancreation

The oft-repeated biblical claim that God created “all things” is, I contend, more inclusive than it is often taken to be in the western theological tradition. By the “western tradition” I mean the heritage of thought begun by Augustine, ensconced by Anselm, and refined by Aquinas (henceforth the AAA tradition). In fact, as I will show, the biblical texts require that everything found in creation is created; not just concrete things and events but properties and laws as well. The grounds for this claim are numerous. First, there is the obvious point that the Bible writers speak of all sorts of realities as created, not just ordinary things and events. For example, they specifically say that space (Rom. 8:38-39) and the order of nature (Gen. 8: 22) are creatures and thus are (at least) created₂₃. And by putting God outside time – as we already saw - they also imply that time is created₂₃. Various writers also speak of the bounds and limits of creatures (laws) as ordinances of God (Jer. 31:35; 33:25; Job 38:33), and Is. 45:7 says that God creates the course of history and whether it contains peace or disaster. The NT carries on the in the same vein when it declares God to be the Creator₂₃ of every “principality and power.”

Moreover, in Rom. 1 Paul describes false religion as changing the truth about God into a falsehood so that people “worship and serve something God created instead of the Creator.” This entails that everything other than God is something God created₃. The strongest text of all, however, is Col. 1: 15-16 which says that God “created all things visible or not visible.” That literally covers everything whatever since it is a tautology that for anything whatever it is either visible or not. Taken together, then, the latter two texts regard the Creator/creature distinction as exhaustive and everything within the cosmos as at least created₃. Finally, consider I Cor. 15:24-28 as compared with Col. 1:17. The latter text says that Christ in his divine nature is the one on whom all things depend, while the former says that Christ will rule “all things” except for God himself. It seems natural to take the “all things” as having the same extension in each case: Christ rules what depends on him. But in that case we have the clear entailment that nothing about creation₂ is either uncreated₃ or not ruled by Christ *except for God himself*. Thus the extension of “all things” is established as everything other than God, visible or invisible.

Often defenders of the AAA view still find this evidence inconclusive, since the only abstract entities spoken of explicitly are time, space, and (indirectly) laws of nature. The texts cited don’t specifically include what the AAA view deems necessary to regard as uncreated₃, namely, the properties that occur in the cosmos but are also attributes of God. So let us now consider a remarkable text in which exactly that happens – a passage in which an attribute of God which is shared by humans is explicitly said to have been (at least) created₃. It is proverbs 8:22-31 where, in a personification, wisdom is represented as saying of herself:

Yahweh possessed me from the beginning of his way, the first
of his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the

beginning, before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth... While as yet he had not made the earth... nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there... I was by him as a master workman; I was daily his delight... and I was with the sons of men.
(my translation)

Now it is never good procedure to rest too much on a single text, so I am not about to suggest that this passage is enough all by itself to establish the position I'm arguing for. What is significant here is not the text in isolation but the way it so beautifully fits with the other texts just cited concerning God as the Creator₃ of everything found in the cosmos. Poetic as it is, it is one of the rare hints about how God possesses his attributes and - even allowing for poetic license - it seems clear that no one holding the AAA view could have written these lines while roaring drunk let alone sober. It says that wisdom is possessed by God himself and was also subsequently "with", that is to say "shared with," humans. Nevertheless, it insists that wisdom was brought forth (minimally, created₃) by God at "the beginning of his way, the first of his works of old" - a clear reference to the creation account in *Genesis*. Thus while it neither denies that God shares wisdom with humans nor that there never was a time when God didn't have it, *it does deny that God's wisdom must be uncreated₃ because he is.*

What is even more important is the fact that the *Proverbs* text does not stand alone in this respect. It is not the only place where scripture ascribes to God an attribute he created₃. The NT speaks this way of concerning no less a doctrine than the Incarnation. That doctrine insists Jesus was fully human and thus a creature₁₃ while at the same time affirming that he is, via the incarnation, the one through whom God bears all his relations to the cosmos (Col. 1:17). Both Aquinas and Nyssa recognize that this means God took on, or took into himself, that which was creaturely₃. Aquinas says that in the incarnation "God assumed human flesh" (*ST* III, q. 1, a. 2) and Nyssa says God became incarnate by "taking into himself humanity in its completeness" (*Eun* 3.3.51). In this way Jesus is the human side of God and God is the divine side of Jesus. To put the point in terms that utilize the different senses of "created" distinguished earlier, we may say that while Jesus' human nature was and is created₁₃, because of the incarnation it is uncreated₂.

What I propose, then, is that God's attributes be understood generally in the light of this incarnational model. They are not the very essence of the Divine being; they are not uncreated₃ as God is: that is, they are not unconditionally non-dependent. They are rather to be thought of as God's energies, or activities¹, or relations to creation all of

¹ A distinction must be drawn here between God's own actions in the world and his willing of events brought about via creaturely causes (Eph. 1:11). God's own actions are uncreated₂, are mostly created₁, and are all created₃. The eternal counsel of his will is not literally an act at all; it is the uncreated₁₂ plan of God for creation. The term "will" is an anthropomorphism intended to convey that there is no further

which are uncreated₂ but are created₃ and have characteristics that are created₃ which God has taken into himself. Some of these may also be created₁, such as being incarnate in Christ, while others are not such as his love and goodness. But the main point is that all of them are uncreated₂ while none of them are uncreated₃ so that nothing found in the cosmos or known by human reason is uncreated₃: not properties, laws, propositions, states of affairs, or any of the other (putative) denizens of Plato's great barnyard in the sky.²

Now it is precisely this view that I find expressed by the essence/energies distinction of the Cappadocian Fathers. For them numbers designate the created₃ quantity of things, but God is one (Deut. 6:4, Is. 44:6); God created₂₃ space but is omnipresent (Ps. 139: 7-12); God is all-powerful although he is the Creator₃ of every power in heaven and earth (Ex. 15:6; Ps. 62:11; Matt. 28:18; Heb 1:3); God is the Creator₁₃ of life while at the same time he is the living God and our Father; God created₁₃ beings that can perceive and feel, but he himself hears and sees us (Ps 17:6; 33:18); logically he knows all things (I John 3:20) and economically he owns the world (Lev. 25:23, Job 41:11). In these, and many other ways, God has taken into himself characteristics he created₃ by willing that they are also characteristics of his actions (energies) in relation to creation. This does not, of course, mean that God first brought such kinds of properties and laws into existence within the cosmos and then borrowed them from creatures. In some cases it seems reasonable to say that he took on certain characteristics simultaneously with their appearance in the cosmos - as with his creation of space and his being omnipresent in it. In most cases, however, it appears that God brought it about that his energies first had a certain characteristic which he then imparted to creatures. This would seem to be the best way to understand the mental and social properties ascribed to God - as we have already seen specifically declared for his wisdom in Prov. 8. As Bradshaw sums up the point, "For the Cappadocians, the [energies] of God are both acts of self-manifestation and God himself appearing in a certain form."³

By this distinction the Cappadocians carefully avoided confusion between God's energies and their attributes on the one hand and his uncreated₁₂₃ being on the other. They insisted that aside from his energy-accommodations to creation, God is "utterly incomprehensible to reason" so that whatever can be rationally understood "belongs to creation".⁴ They denied that God's being is to be identified with his attributes⁵ and asserted instead that "Every name, whether invented by human custom or handed down

ground or reason for that plan. As Calvin puts it: "Justly does Augustine complain that God is insulted whenever any higher reason than his will is demanded" (*Inst.* I, xiv, 1).

² For an example of a thinker in the Reformed tradition who argues for exactly the reverse position, see the last chapter of N. Wolterstorff's, *On Universals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

³ *Aristotle East and West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 182.

⁴ J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 42, 45, 50-54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

by the scriptures ...does not signify what [God's] nature is in itself." Rather, "these names are true of God because they refer to his energies, the activities in which God engages in relating to creatures."⁶ Of God's own being, says Nyssa, "we know nothing else but this one thing, that God is."⁷ And St Basil takes this a step further when he explains that the essential being of God "is free of quality"⁸ so it is no surprise when he adds "We say we know the greatness of God, the power of God, the wisdom of God, the goodness of God...but not the very being of God."⁹ To this he adds that "...in the various manifestations of God to humanity, God both adapts to humanity and speaks in human language."¹⁰ This position is pithily summed up in Basil's most oft-quoted comment: "We do not know what God is but what God is not, and how he relates to creatures." This entails that while all the energies (along with their attributes), are true of God they are nevertheless not the uncreated₁₂₃ essential being of God, but are all dependent on (created₃ by) God. As St Gregory Palamas puts it: "[God's] energies do not comprise the being of God; it is he who gives them their existence...God by a superabundance of goodness towards us [although] transcendent over all things, incomprehensible and inexpressible, consents to become particible [sic] to our intelligence" and "in his voluntary condescension imposes on himself a really diversified mode of existence."¹¹

All this fits beautifully with what I have called the incarnational model for understanding God's attributes. Aside from the individuality and consciousness of each person of the Trinity and their relations to one another, God's knowable attributes are all characteristics of his actions and relations to creatures₁₂₃. These are true of God because he willed them to be; God has chosen the character by which he relates to us in the ways he acts and which he reveals. Thus God, otherwise unknowable, is knowable because he willed to impose on himself a "mode of existence" (energies) we can understand.

Before leaving this brief sketch to contrast it with the AAA tradition, I want to make clear why I include Luther, Calvin¹², and Barth are among those who hold the Cappadocian view of God. Let's start with Luther:

...God does not manifest himself except through his works [*energies*] and the Word, because the meaning of these is understood... Whatever else belongs to the Divinity cannot be grasped and understood such as being outside time.¹³ [*Italics mine*]

⁶ Ibid, 209, 210.

⁷ Ibid, 214.

⁸ Ibid, 242

⁹ Ibid, 55.

¹⁰ Ibid, 88.

¹¹ J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: Faith Press, 1964), 211, 204, 226.

¹² I have tried unsuccessfully to discover whether Luther & Calvin directly derived their doctrine of God from the Cappadocians or came up with it from their own studies of scripture.

Now God in his own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor does he wish us to deal with him. We have to do with him as clothed by his Word, by which he presents himself to us.¹⁴

Compare also the pithy comment quoted from St Basil with this by John Calvin:

...there is nothing so peculiar to God than eternity and self-existence.” (*Inst.*, I, xiv, 3).

And then also compare the following from Calvin with the quotes above from St Palamas;

...in the enumeration of his perfections, [God] is revealed not as he is in himself, but in relation to us...Every perfection [ascribed] to God may be contemplated in creation; and, hence, such as we feel him to be when experience is our guide, such he declares himself to be in his word. (*Inst.*, I, x, 2)¹⁵

This is why Calvin speaks of God’s nature as the “character in which he is pleased to manifest himself” (*Inst.*, III, 11, 6) and elsewhere remarks:

His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending human thought; but on each of his works (*energies*) his glory is engraven in characters so bright ...that none can plead ignorance (*Inst.*, I, v, 1). [Italics mine]

Wherefore let us willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself... [and] conceive of him as he has made himself known, and in our inquiries make application to no other quarter than his word (*Inst.*, I, xiii, 21).

The Lord is manifested by his perfections...Hence...in seeking

¹³ “Lectures on Genesis” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. J. Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), vol. 1, 11.

¹⁴ From *The Bondage of the Will* as quoted by J. Dillenberger in *Martin Luther* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor books, 1961), 191.

¹⁵ As well become clear later, I think it an exaggeration to say that “every” perfection ascribed to God is in relation to us. Consciousness, personality, individuality, and the mutual love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for example, are generated by the Divine Being eternally. They are dependent on the divine Being and thus are created₃, but uncreated₁₂. By contrast, such attributes as justice, covenant faithfulness, mercy, anger, and judgment can be thought of as attributes of God’s energies (or relations) with respect to creatures₁₂₃.

God, the most direct path...is not to attempt with presumptuous curiosity to pry into his essence... but to contemplate him in his works (*energies*), by which he draws near, becomes familiar, and in a manner communicates himself to us (*Inst.*, I, v, 9).
[Italics mine]

Finally, consider the following from Karl Barth:

...God's being transcends the contrast of *simplicitas* and *multiplicitas*...if God is... the one true God even in his works *ad extra*, (*energies*) we cannot emphasize either his *simplicitas* or *multiplicitas* as though one or the other were the very being of God.. rather... they are both included in God himself.¹⁶
[Italics in perens mine]

The “included” here is important as it reflects the earlier point that the created₃ characteristics that are true of God's energies are ones he has “taken into himself” such that they are the “mode of existence” he has willed for himself for our sake. They thus constitute the “nature in which God is pleased to manifest himself” (Calvin) because they are the nature he has “imposed on himself” (Palamas). They are created₃, but they are really God because they are uncreated₂ and because he has sworn by his covenantal oath that they will comprise his nature forever. From now on I will call this Cappadocian and Reformational view the C/R view for short.

B. God as All and Only Perfections

What I find in Augustine concerning these issues is an utterly different story, a story that is completely incompatible with the C/R view. In *The City of God* viii, 6, Augustine praises the Platonists for a number of points he thinks they got right. In doing so, he differs from the Cappadocians by regarding the actions and attributes of God as identical with his being:

To Him it is not one thing to *be*, and another to live, as though He could be not living; nor is it to Him one thing to live and another to understand, as though he could live not understanding; nor is it to Him one thing to understand, another thing to be blessed, as though He could understand and not be blessed. But to Him to live, to understand, to be blessed, are to *be*.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.T. Thomson, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), vol. II, 29, 1, p. 333. I must admit that other remarks made in this same section seem to me inconsistent with the ones I've quoted, but the quotes nevertheless represent a recurring theme that runs through the section.

¹⁷ Trans. Marcus Dods, (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 251.

This identity of attributes with God's being and with one another Augustine immediately calls God's "simplicity." He then goes on to say that the Platonists had spoken of this simple unity as the "existence in which is the first form, unchangeable, and therefore not admitting of degrees of comparison, and in that they most rightly believed was the first principle of things, which was not made, and by which all things were made."¹⁸

It is an underemphasized point that what Augustine has done here is adopt a *theory* about the being of God, a theory that identifies God with part of Plato's theory of forms. Scripture says nothing of God's being simple or a form or possessing perfections. The distinction of essence and energies, by contrast, is not a hypothesis but is a direct *inference* from the scriptural teaching of pancreation. So just as it is an inference that if there is only one God there are not two or five, in like manner it is an inference that if God created₃ everything visible or invisible, then he created₃ goodness, justice, wisdom, etc. And, in the case of wisdom, that inference is explicitly supported by scripture. Augustine's willingness to theorize about God has remained one of the chief differences between the AAA and C/R traditions so far as their idea of theology is concerned. Bradshaw summarizes this difference nicely:

The Byzantines took for granted that...their own task [was] that of applying...inherited wisdom to the issues at hand. Consequently, even a step of great originality was rarely heralded as such. Behind this conservatism there lay a deeper cause, namely, the apophaticism at the root of the entire tradition. What is the point of spinning words about God when he can be known only through practice? On such a view theology, however complex it may become, is ... simply the enterprise of preserving "the faith once delivered to the saints." To claim (as does Aquinas, for instance) that it is a science in the Aristotelian sense – one that has God as its subject matter – would have struck the Byzantines as strangely pretentious.¹⁹

For all the insight of this remark, however, I think Bradshaw comes up short by ending it with "pretentious." There is something more serious at stake here, namely, the reason why western thinkers have not seen it to be pretentious. That reason is just this: since form was the principle of rationality in Platonism, Augustine's identification of God with the first form entailed the consequence (which Augustine explicitly drew) that God is both supremely rational and intelligible. His pithy summary of the point goes: "God is for the mind to understand as body is for the eye to see."²⁰ Aquinas too, takes it that the

¹⁸ Ibid, 251.

¹⁹ Bradshaw, Ibid, 221.

²⁰ Sermon 117.5, cited by Bradshaw, Ibid p. 226.

essence of God is the most intelligible object, even though the human mind will have to await the beatific vision to attain knowledge of it.²¹ But either version is in direct opposition to the C/R position that the essence of God is beyond knowing *because it is the creative source of all rationality*. Apropos here is Lossky's remark concerning Origen and Clement who, even before Augustine, were:

...too anxious to show pagans that all the treasures of Hellenic wisdom were contained and surpassed in the "true philosophy" of the church. Involuntarily they brought about a kind of synthesis... [with] Platonic intellectualism alien to the spirit of the gospel.²²

In Platonic writings (and to some extent in Origen) the intelligible world actually belongs to the sphere of the divine; it was co-natural with God for Clement and Origen, something opposed to the sensible world. For St Gregory Nyssa, on the contrary, the line of demarcation passes directly between the created world (sensible and intelligible) and the divine being.²³

In *De Trinitate vii. 1.2*, Augustine also advances what was to become the standard argument in defense of the simplicity theory (repeated by Aquinas), namely, that if God's attributes were not identical with his being he would have to possess them by participation and so would be inferior to them. In other words, if God as supreme form has to include all the other perfections (forms) to be God, then unless they were identical to him he'd have to depend on them for his divine nature. In that case the Forms would be unconditionally non-dependent and God would not be. While that is a legitimate concern, it is not a valid argument since those are not the only two possibilities. In addition to the option that God depends on the forms and the option that he is identical with them, there is also the option that (if there are such things as perfections) they depend on God. *It is this identification of the being of God with perfections understood as Platonic forms, together with the simplicity hypothesis, that I contend is nothing less than the fall of Christian theology*. It abandons pancreation along with the view that all the attributes true of God are actions (and their properties) which are uncreated₂ and created₃ because willed by God. It replaces that inference from scripture with Plato's hypothesis of uncreated₁₂₃ perfections (forms) which are made to be identical with God's being. It is an attempt to accommodate the Jewish and NT idea of God to a pagan Greek idea of ultimate reality, and it results in a juxtaposition which is no better than an oil and water

²¹ Bradshaw, *Ibid.*, 255.

²² Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Crestwood, NY: ST Vladimir's Seminary, 1983), 65.

²³ *Ibid.*, 86. Comp. also the comment of G. Florovsky to the effect that Basil "...did not so much adapt neo-Platonism as overcome it." Quoted in Pelikan, *Ibid.*, 8.

mixture. It is a view that is inconsistent with scripture, with itself, and, at times, both. Here's why.

First of all, scripture never describes God as possessing – let alone *being* – perfections in a Platonic sense. For Plato a perfection (form) was the highest possible instance of a property that makes something better to have it than to lack it.²⁴ This hypothesis is one that has no convincing argument in its favor: why couldn't degrees of goodness, justice, etc., be like the number series? Why can't it be that there is no such thing as the highest instance of any great-making property just as there is no last number? It is significant in this connection that St Basil's comment about perfections is: "*If there are perfections, God created them.*" This point is all the more pertinent in the light of Aristotle's critique of the platonic theory (the famous "third man" argument), as it is one to which there is no redeeming reply. And while Augustine may not have known of Aristotle's argument, Aquinas surely did. Nevertheless he ignores it as is shown in the next quote from him below. By contrast to the Platonist position, the meaning of the term "perfection" in the Old Testament and the New Testament is "complete," not "the highest instance of a great-making property." So when Jesus tells his disciples that they should be "perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" he is not telling them to be the unity of all perfections - which on the AAA view would amount to telling them they should be God! - but to be as completely faithful to their end of the covenant as their heavenly Father is to his end of it.

Secondly, because Augustine views God's perfections as uncreated,¹²³ Platonic forms and because there is only one God, he is forced to conclude that God is simple. That is to say, since there is only one God and all the perfections are identical with God's being, *they must be identical with one another*. As Bradshaw points out, the term "simplicity" had already been used in theology, but had a very different meaning for the Cappadocians: "...Nyssa follows a very similar line of thought [to Augustine] in arguing that God is identical with his own perfections, yet he locates the identity at the level of [energies] rather than that of essence."²⁵ In fact, for Palamas, simplicity *is* one of God's energies.²⁶ By rejecting the C/R notion of simplicity, which meant only that God is identical with himself, the AAA version of has led to a number of blatant contradictions with scripture and host of unsolvable logical difficulties, a few of which I will develop shortly. Before I do that, however, I first want to make sure it is clear that the other two pivotal figures of the western tradition I named earlier actually did follow Augustine in this fall.

In section 18 of the *Proslogion*, Anselm says to God:

²⁴ The phrase "great-making properties" is Alvin Plantinga's. See *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 98.

²⁵ Bradshaw, *Ibid*, 225.

²⁶ Bradshaw quotes Palamas: *Ibid.*, 240.

You are, assuredly, life, you are wisdom, You are truth,
You are goodness, You are blessedness, You are eternity,
and You are every true good...How then, Lord, are you
all these things? ... You are unity itself not divisible...
life and wisdom and the other [attributes], then, are not
parts of You, but all are one and each one of them is
wholly what You are and what all the others are.²⁷

This same view is also taken over by Thomas Aquinas.

[there is a] gradation to be found in things. Among beings
there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and
the like. But *more* and *less* are predicated of different things
according as they resemble in their different ways some-
thing which is the maximum...so that there is something
which is the most in being...Therefore there must also be
something which is to all beings the cause of their being,
goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God
(*ST.*, Q 2, a 3).²⁸

In speaking ...of Godhead, or life or the like as being in
God, we indicate the composite way in which our intellect
understands, but not that there is any composition in God...
(*ST.*, Q 3, a 3).

The absolute simplicity of God may be shown in many
ways ...since God is absolute form, or rather absolute
being, He can in no way be composite (*ST.*, Q 3, a 7).

So what is it about this view that is inconsistent with pancreation? Why is it that making God identical to his attributes is inconsistent with the doctrine that everything true of the cosmos is minimally created₃? The answer is simple (no pun intended). If God just *is* the form of all perfections, and those perfections are shared in lesser degrees by creatures, then creatures possess imperfect degrees (or “intensities”) of *the same uncreated₃ properties*. Thomas himself recognizes this point:

...when one perfection held by many things is shared in
different intensities, then it comes to those imperfectly
possessing it from that being which perfectly possesses

²⁷ *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. Davies & Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). 98.,

²⁸ The quotes from the *Summa Theologica* are all from *Introduction to St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton Pegis (New York: The Modern Library, 1948).

it (Disputations, III *de Potentia*).²⁹

...God is known from the perfections which flow from him and are to be found in creatures yet which exist in him in a transcendent way (*ST I a q. 13, a. 3*).

‘God is good’ ...means that what we call goodness in creatures exists in God in a higher way. Thus God is not good (merely) because he causes goodness but rather goodness flows from him because he is good (*ST I a q. 13, a. 2*).

In other words, creatures possess a less-than-infinite degree of *the same qualities with which God is identical in an infinite mode*. But the difference in mode of possession does nothing to cancel the consequence that what creatures possess, when they share a quality or capacity true of God, is a less-than-infinite mode of an uncreated₁₂₃ property or capacity – uncreated₁₂₃ because the doctrine of simplicity requires it to be identical with the uncreated₁₂₃ being of God. In this way the deference to Platonism found in all three theologians ends up deifying properties and capacities found in creatures and thus rendering humans and other creatures partly uncreated₁₂₃ and thus partly identical with God.

This point is confirmed by how it affects Aquinas’ theory of religious language, the theory he calls “proper proportionality.”³⁰ In dealing with the question of how our language can truly describe God, Thomas answers that there is an analogy between the terms we use to refer to goodness, justice, etc., as they occur in creatures and as they are true of God. In explaining this analogy Thomas distinguishes between what he calls the *res significata* of a term and its *modus significandi*. The *res significata* is the quality being ascribed to something while the *modus significandi* is the mode in which a thing possesses that *res*. Neither alone constitutes the complete referent of a term for a perfection, as both are always involved. Each creature, according to Thomas, possesses its properties in a mode appropriate to its level in the (neo-Platonic) scale of beings. So a pie, a suit of clothes, and a human, e.g., each possess goodness in a mode appropriate to a pie, a suit of clothes, or a human. God, on the other hand, is not on the scale of beings at all. God possesses – or rather just *is* – the simple unity of all perfections in the infinite mode. The difference in the language attributing goodness to God, then, lies not in the *res significata* but in the *modus significandi*. The sameness of meaning that prevents the language from being hopelessly equivocal is that the same *res* is shared in common *de re*. So God is infinite goodness while we humans merely possess a finite degree of goodness

²⁹ *St Thomas Aquinas Philosophical Texts*, Trans T. Gilby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 59.

³⁰ See the excellent exposition of Thomas’ theory in J.F. Ross’ “Analogy as a Rule of Meaning for Religious Language” in the *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3, Sept. 1971, p. 468-504..

in the mode-appropriate-to-a-human. This otherwise plausible view of language about God is ruined, however, when conjoined to the AAA view of simplicity. For if the *res* (goodness) is uncreated₁₂₃ in God it has to be uncreated₁₂₃ in creatures. The same *res* may be in the infinite mode in one being and in a finite mode in another, but it cannot be created₃ in one and uncreated₁₂₃ in the other and still be the same *res*. To deny this is self-contradictory.

No appeal to a different version of analogy will overcome this point. For example, it won't help to propose that goodness in God isn't identical even *qua res* with the goodness in us, but that the two are merely alike instead. The reason is that for there to be any analogy whatever - for two things to be alike at all - there must be some *respect* in which they are alike. And whatever that respect is, is a property they share in common. To deny this point one would have to assert that two things can be alike although there is no respect in which they are alike, which would also be a blatant self-contradiction. So if someone were to try to get round this critique of proper-proportionality-plus-simplicity by saying that God's goodness¹ is in no way identical with what can be true of any creature but is merely *like* creaturely goodness², then there would still have to be some respect - such as "alike in goodness"³ - which is common to them both. So if God's goodness and our goodness are even alike, they would minimally have to share either goodness or likeness in which case the same point made about simplicity spoiling proper proportionality recurs: goodness³ or likeness would then have to be either uncreated₁₂₃ or created₃ but not both. If either of them were uncreated₁₂₃ in God, it would be uncreated₃ in creatures; and if either is created₃ in creatures, it is in God. For this reason when the AAA theology makes God the unity of his attributes, any idea of analogy it may appeal to as an explanation of religious language is forced to end with a partial pantheism despite its best intentions to the contrary.³¹

The C/R view, on the other hand, can hold that all the properties and capacities which creatures share with God are created₁₃ or created₃.³² This is why, on this view, no elaborate theory is needed to explain how our language can apply to God. Predication about God - while its truth is taken on faith - can nevertheless be viewed as ordinary language. This means, e.g., that when scripture says God is good it attributes to God what we usually mean along with whatever covenantal qualifications are stipulated by scripture. For sure, God's capacity for goodness exceeds any creature's capacity. But that

³¹ Thomas does, indeed, struggle to avoid just this consequence. See, e.g., *SCG* I..26.9, 10 where he denies that God is the common being in all things holding instead that there is in all created things a likeness to the divine being and adding elsewhere that God is the *esse* of all things not essentially but causally (*Comm. on Sentences* 1, Dist. 8, Q. 1, art. 2). But this way out of pantheism is ruined by the doctrine of simplicity because likeness requires sameness at some point, and simplicity entails that any sameness can only be identity with the essence of God..

³² The AAA defenders have always objected that this makes God's attributes "accidents" in the Aristotelian sense. Since that is a technical sense for an inessential property, Palamas denies God's energies are either substance or accidents (*Capita*, 137). But clearly they are inessential, whereas the AAA tradition takes all God's attributes to be essential.

difference does not require that the meaning of the term connotes an infinite mode of goodness utterly unknowable to us. The most important difference between the terms when used of God as over against when they are used of humans, is not their meaning. It is not that “love,” or “goodness,” or “anger,” or “forgiveness” don’t *mean* what we usually mean; rather, the difference is that it is *God* who is angry or pleased with us; it is *God* who is good to us, loves us, and forgives us.

This is also why the C/R view of sanctification, the process by which believers come more and more to be “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), does not require that they become identical with God in a pantheistic sense. On the C/R view, the “divine nature” is comprised of those characteristics which make up the nature of God as incarnated in Christ.³³ But since sharing those characteristics means sharing created₃ properties, the progress believers make in becoming more Christ-like (theosis) is not the same as becoming identical with the essential being of God which is what the AAA view is forced to say by the doctrine of simplicity.³⁴ And notice that this criticism still holds if creatures are said to “imitate” the perfections of God, or “participate” in them, rather than to “share” them. For imitation and participation are in the same boat as “likeness” so far as their basis *de re* is concerned, namely, they are only intelligible if they involve a shared property.

II. Some Further Criticisms of the AAA View

I have been arguing that a consequence of the AAA simplicity theory is that humans and other creatures are partly uncreated₃. Bad as that is, it is not the only difficulty that results from Platonizing the doctrine of God. Another consequence is one I mentioned briefly earlier: if God’s attributes are all identical with God then they are all identical with one another. Since there is only one God there can really be only one attribute (perfection, form). Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas all affirm that point. But in that case although we have ideas of what the terms naming perfections ascribed to God

³³ Although it has at times been denied, it is nevertheless the case that both Luther and Calvin explicitly asserted this doctrine. See Carl Mosser, “The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and deification” in *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, SJT 55(1): 36-57, 2002.

³⁴ This is Palamas’ objection to Barlaam’s contention that there is no other reality than the Divine essence and creatures. Palamas’ reply was that creatures would then have to exist by participating in the divine essence which is pantheism. See Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, 239. Needless to say, this would be even more obviously true with respect to theosis. The same point is recognized by A N Williams in *The Ground of Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Williams describes the Orthodox position this way: “...that in God which we encounter and which transforms us, is the divine energy, not the divine essence” (p. 118). At other points, however, Williams seems to forget the importance of that distinction. For example, she suggests that for Palamas the essence/energies distinction is merely nominal (p.138) and ends the book repeating that suggestion! And this is despite the fact that Palamas says the energies are not merely ways of thinking about God but are “realities in God” (ovtov tou Theou, *Capita* 75). See also the quote from Palamas referenced in note xi about God imposing on himself a knowable and diversified form of existence.

mean, they are not true of the being of God. According to the proper proportionality theory, the terms have the same *res* but differ according to their *modus*. But the simplicity hypothesis destroys all that: justice that is identical with power which is identical with mercy which is the same as wisdom is something of which we have no idea whatever. There is no longer any sameness of *res* between these terms and whatever is true of God. There is therefore no analogy and no likeness with our ordinary meanings for these terms. They cannot designate the same properties and so cannot be the properties we connote in ordinary speech at all. If simplicity is insisted on, then our language cannot convey anything that God is even *like*.

Disastrous as this result is, it is not as bad as yet another which also follows from identifying God with his attributes. This additional calamity is that it makes God identical with a set of abstract properties which are identical with one another, which entails that God is an abstract property. And it is significant that even thinkers otherwise inclined toward the AAA view find this consequence of God's simplicity incompatible with the gospel. For example, Alvin Plantinga considers several ways of construing simplicity and arrives at the same judgment on all of them. "Taken at face value", he says, "the Thomistic doctrine of divine simplicity seems entirely unacceptable...It begins in a pious and proper concern for God's sovereignty; it ends by flouting the most fundamental claims of theism."³⁵ By this he means that an abstract property cannot make covenants with humans or love them, because an abstract property cannot *do* anything. Nevertheless, Plantinga does not take the C/R alternative but tries to stay within the AAA tradition. That is, he retains the position that God's attributes must be uncreated₁₂₃ because God is, while jettisoning the simplicity theory. His main reason for doing so is his claim that pancreation is untenable with respect to the necessary truths of mathematics and logic.

III. Criticisms of the C/R Theology

A. The Criticism of Alvin Plantinga

Before going ahead with Plantinga's criticism, I want to make it clear that he is correct to think that the C/R position includes the necessary truths among the "all things visible or invisible" which are to be seen as created₃ by God. The Cappadocians stressed that the entire cosmos is to be seen as contingent. As Pelikan puts it:

Their polemics simultaneously against *ananke* (necessity) and *tyche* (chance) not only protected them against a theory of randomness...but against the opposite extreme as well, a theory of cosmic necessity as an iron law over

³⁵ *Does God Have A Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1983), pp. 53-54.

which even the all-sovereign Creator was powerless.³⁶
(perens mine)

And if that is not explicit enough to make clear that “cosmic necessity” includes the rational necessary truths as well as laws of nature, Palamas makes that point explicit by adding that even the laws of logic “do not have absolute value.”³⁷ The full significance of this remark can perhaps only be appreciated by contrasting it to this one by St Thomas:

The absolute possible is not so called in reference either to higher causes, or to inferior causes, but in reference to itself...So it is clear that the omnipotence of God does not take away from things their impossibility and necessity. (*ST Q 25, a 3*)

Of course, Thomas does not mean by this that God is ruled by the laws of logic if they are thought of as realities independent and distinct from him. Rather, they hold for God because - like all the other perfections - they are unified in the divine being. Thus while God is limited by what is logically possible and impossible, that only means he is bound by his own nature. This is precisely why God’s omnipotence is to be understood, according to Thomas, not as his ability to do anything whatever but his ability to do *anything that is possible*. In this way the limitation to God’s power is merely that it cannot violate his own nature which is to be self-consistent.

But while Plantinga does not agree with Thomas that the necessary truths are included in the simple unity of God, he does join Thomas in rejecting the idea that the necessary truths of logic or math could be God’s creations₃. The foil for his critique of that view is the only major western philosopher to have held logic to be created₃, Rene Descartes. Since I maintain that Descartes’ position (as described by Plantinga) is not that of the Cappadocians or Reformers, I will not be concerned in what follows with all of Plantinga’s criticisms of Descartes. What I will be concerned with instead are those of his criticisms that apply to the C/R position as well as to Descartes, and with Plantinga’s own position which is also at odds with the C/R position.

Against pancreation, Plantinga first holds that if God has created the necessary truths, then he can violate them. He says:

Why not...see [Descartes] as arguing
(41) God has infinite power
(45) If God has infinite power, there are no necessary truths
Therefore

³⁶ Pelikan, *Ibid*, 256.

³⁷ *Tr II*, 1, 27.

(43) There are no necessary truths?³⁸

Secondly, Plantinga argues against pancreation on the grounds that if God created all properties and laws found in the cosmos, and there are no necessary truths, then God cannot have an essential nature:

On Descartes' view, then, God has no nature... because none of his properties is essential to him. There is no property he could not have lacked...³⁹

The first thing...is that this view is indeed wildly counter-intuitive...it means that God could have brought it about ...that he was powerless, without knowledge, and wicked. Indeed, he could have brought it about that he was powerless, without knowledge, and wicked, but at the same time omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.⁴⁰

This leaves us, Plantinga says, with “two intuitions:”

...the intuition that some propositions are impossible and the intuition that if God is sovereign then everything is possible. But when the issue is thus baldly stated, so it seems to me, there really isn't any issue. Obviously, not everything is possible... it is impossible that God be omniscient and at the same time not know anything at all.⁴¹

Plantinga still wants to maintain, however, that God is sovereign over creation and that the necessary truths do not exist independently of God. So he proposes they be regarded as ideas in God's mind which, given God's nature, he cannot help but know and affirm. (Again, notice that this view is not the same as Aquinas', since necessary truths are not included in and identical with God's nature – the view Plantinga rejected for excellent reasons.) So it remains for Plantinga to establish some way these ideas can depend upon God. He says;

By way of conclusion I wish to ask but not answer the following question. Take any necessary proposition:
(68) $7 + 5 = 12$
for example is equivalent to
(69) God believes (68);

³⁸ Plantinga, *Ibid*, 122.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 126.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 127.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 139.

and
 (70) necessarily $7 + 5 = 12$
 is equivalent to
 (71) It is part of God's nature to believe that $7 + 5 = 12$.
 Can we then see (71) as *prior* to (70)? Explanatorily prior
 perhaps? Can we explain (70) by appealing to (71)...
 More exactly is there a sensible sense of explain such that
 in that sense (71) is the explanation of (70) but (70 is not
 the explanation of (71)? ...If we can answer [such questions]
 affirmatively, then perhaps we can point to an important
 dependence of abstract objects on God, even though
 necessary truths about these objects are not within
 his control.⁴²

But while these are surely good questions, I think there are equally good reasons why they must be answered negatively. That is, there are reasons for thinking not all the necessary truths can be explained by, or grounded in, God's knowing or affirming them. The reasons are that on Plantinga's own version of the AAA view, God must already conform to many of the necessary truths in order for him to know or affirm them. E.g., God must have the property of being numerically one so as to be conscious of the idea of one. The number one, therefore, can neither be explained by being an idea in God's mind nor can it in any way depend on his having, knowing, or affirming it. God would already have to be numerically identical with himself to have an idea. The dependency, then, goes in quite the other direction. The same would also hold for logical consistency. Since on

Plantinga's view, the law of non-contradiction can't simply be unified with the other perfections in God's nature - can't just *be* God - logical consistency has to be a property God possesses: God must be logically identical with himself. And as it is a necessary truth that nothing can both be and not-be in the same sense at the same time, God also would have to conform to that law in order to exist and to have the idea of it. Thus once again, we are left with a necessary truth which would not depend on God but rather God would depend on conforming to it.

Moreover, these same points completely undermine Plantinga's own Platonist view of logic and math which he expresses this way:

From [my] point of view, then, exploring the realm of abstract objects can be seen as exploring the nature of God... Mathematics thus takes its place as one of the loci of theology... the same goes for logic, both broadly and narrowly conceived... each theorem of logic - first

⁴² Ibid, 145-146.

order logic with identity, let's say, - is such that affirming it is part of God's nature.⁴³

The trouble is that God's affirming the number one or the law of non-contradiction makes no more difference to either of them than does my affirming them. Neither depends on me, and if they are uncreated, neither depends on God. And while nothing amiss follows from the fact that I depend on the logical and mathematical order of the cosmos in order to exist, something terribly amiss follows from a position that is forced to say God does.

But is Plantinga correct when he says that if God created the laws of math and logic then everything is possible? Does God's having created them mean that God can violate them so that there really are no necessary truths?⁴⁴ I think not. First of all, on the C/R view God's essential being is completely unknowable and "devoid of quality" which would include the quantitative and logical properties and the laws that hold for them, as well as all other kinds of properties and laws. On this position, therefore, saying that God transcends a law because he has created it doesn't entail that he can violate it, rather it entails that it doesn't apply to him. And nothing can violate a law that the law doesn't apply to. So there is no reason to suppose that saying the laws of math or logic are created, entails that those laws are not really necessary truths - where "necessary" means necessary *for creatures*. After all, how would it follow that if God built certain laws into the cosmos, then those laws don't necessarily hold for creatures? Just why would it be that if God created the cosmos such that everything within it is subject to the necessary truths of logic and math, then the things within the cosmos are not really subject to those laws?

Perhaps what is behind the fear that if God transcends the law of rationality then the integrity of creatures is threatened, is the fear that without the AAA limit on God's omnipotence God could do miracles that would bring it about that *creatures* violate the necessary truths.⁴⁵ But that is not the C/R view either. The idea of absolute and unrestricted omnipotence arises from regarding God's attributes as perfections (forms) in the Platonic sense. On the C/R view, God's attributes are his energies or properties of his energies, and this goes for omnipotence too. Omnipotence is not a property God must have to be God; God neither possesses the perfection of absolute power nor is identical

⁴³ Ibid, 144.

⁴⁴ I remind you that while Descartes may perhaps justly be accused of this consequence, I am not defending Descartes' position.

⁴⁵ The counter-examples that are alleged to follow on this position all commit the fallacy of *petitio principii*. For instance, it is alleged that unless God is constrained by the law of non-contradiction he could force creatures to break it by, for example, making 5-sided triangles or $1 + 1 = 8$. But what such supposed counter-examples assume is that "5-sided", "triangle", and all the other terms used would continue to connote and denote in exactly the same way even if the law of non-contradiction didn't hold for them. But if God were to suspend that law for any creature it would no longer be the same creature. In fact, there are no *conceivable* counter-examples to pancreation since nothing that is exempt from the law of non-contradiction can be conceived at all.

with it. Instead, God is the creator₂₃ of every kind of power, and his omnipotence should be thought of as his control of all the powers he has created. That is to say, omnipotence is to be understood in the same way the NT reports Christ's understanding of its having been conferred on him: "All power has been given me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). That is not absolute power; it is not the idea of power that is rebutted by the school child's question: "Can God make a rock so big he can't lift it?" It is rather the Creator's complete control over all *created* powers – all the powers in heaven and in earth. And those powers were created₂₃ in subjection to the (created₂₃) laws that govern them.⁴⁶

One additional comment on miracles before dropping the subject: I think Augustine got the notion of miracles right when he said that God doesn't both sustain the laws of creation and at the same time force creatures to violate them. On this view, then, a miracle is not to be thought of as a violation of a law of nature. God can bring about events through his control of all created powers that humans can neither explain nor duplicate, but he does not need to violate any laws to do so. For example, a book supported by my hand doesn't violate the law of gravity by not falling to the floor since it's not an unsupported object. If I remove my hand and God holds it up it's still not an unsupported object. God makes wine out of water in a few minutes; grapes plus yeast do the same although it takes them longer. Why suppose God needs to violate any law to do it faster? (Just which law(s) would that be?)

In sum, there is no reason from the C/R point of view to deny that there are either laws of nature or rationally necessary truths which really hold for creatures. That is because God's own omnipotence is neither taken to be an absolute attribute with which he is identical nor an absolute perfection he must possess. That entire Platonic ontology is obviated by recognizing that omnipotence is also one of God's energies, not his transcendent essence.

B. The Reservations of David Bradshaw

In the book *Aristotle, East and West* - which I've already cited several times - David Bradshaw gives an impressive account of the distinction between essence and energies as applied to the Christian God. He traces the notion of energies from its beginnings in the works of Aristotle, through its development in Plotinus, and its adaptation by Christian theologians of the eastern church – the Cappadocians in particular. The exposition Bradshaw offers is a significant contribution to the discussion of east – west theological differences, and in a number of respects confirms the comparison I have drawn above. For example, on p. 165 Bradshaw notes how Aquinas' position that "everything that is not the divine essence is a creature" leaves no room for

⁴⁶ Thus we arrive at the position of limited omnipotence as does the Thomistic tradition (that "omnipotence" means God can do whatever is possible) though we hold this for completely different reasons. It is not because the laws of math & logic are uncreated and identical with the Divine essence, but because omnipotence is one of God's energies subject to the laws God has created₃.

God's energies as neither creatures distinct from God nor identical to the divine essence. And, having shown the doctrinal applications of the essence/energies distinction at length, he sums up its advantages this way:

...let us take stock of what a powerful tool the distinction of ousia and energeiai has turned out to be. It furnishes the Cappadocians with an important argument for the orthodox view of the Trinity; it enables them to unify this argument with their doctrine of divine names, including their apophaticism about the divine essence; and it gives them a framework... for understanding divine freedom. Nor is that all. In the next section I will show that it plays an important role in their mysticism and their understanding of the Christian life. (p. 172)

Despite all this, Bradshaw's splendid exposition then falters with respect to the logical entailments of that very distinction. Having seen that the Cappadocians rejected the idea that God's energies are necessary to his essence (as the perfections were for Augustine and Aquinas), Bradshaw waffles:

...it is perhaps at this point that difficulties are most apparent. How is it that the divine energeiai truly are God, if they are also willed by God? Does the fact that they could be different mean that God himself could be different? Could God act in such a way that goodness or power, for instance, would not be among his energeiai? These questions show that a blanket assertion of freedom is no more adequate than a blanket assertion of necessity. (p. 171 -2)

This, of course, amounts to a serious criticism of the essence/energies distinction even though Bradshaw doesn't present it as such. Instead, he calls for a way around it:

There must be some principled way of distinguishing the features that necessarily accompany any manifestation of God from those that result from choice... it is hard to know how such issues could be addressed, other than by attempting to understand God's external activity as in some way a manifestation – albeit a free manifestation – of his internal life. (p. 172)

The proposal that this fundamental distinction needs to lapse back into regarding (at least some of) God's energies as necessary, coupled with no suggestion as to how this could be done, amounts, I contend, to undermining what is crucial to the distinction. Moreover, it does so because fails to grasp the distinction itself in important respects.

To begin with, there is a trivial sense in which anything God willed to reveal would be a “manifestation” of him, so that cannot be what Bradshaw is after. He must instead be seeking a manifestation that is *like* the very essence of God. But if that essence is the creator of, and thus transcends, every kind of properties and laws that are found in creation and attributed to God – and if the being of God is, as Basil put it, “entirely free of quality” - then there are no properties that could comprise a nature for God's essence. There is therefore nothing for a manifestation to be “like” - nothing it could share properties with. On this view, God's freedom with respect to his energies is not, therefore, an arbitrariness akin to the arbitrariness Ockham took to follow from his (mis)construal of God's omnipotence. It is rather God's transcendence of both necessity and freedom as they hold for creation and as we know them. For us, freedom means what is possible under the laws that govern us. But the freedom of God's essential being is precisely that he created all laws and is subject to none.⁴⁷ For that reason there are no distinctions to be drawn among God's energies as to which are necessary and which he is free to choose. Such a suggestion can only be made if it is assumed that God has a primordial nature comprised of characteristics he just couldn't fail to have and which are subject to necessary relations, where both the characteristics and their relations are uncreated₁₂₃. And that assumption differs from the AAA tradition only in supposing those characteristics to be unknowable by us rather than in supposing many of them (the perfections) are knowable. And both versions differ fundamentally from the C/R position that there simply are no such things.

As to the question how God's energies could be God if God willed them, the answer lies, as I have suggested, with the incarnational model for how anything knowable by us can be true of God. God's actions are just as really God as are our own. If I go to the fridge to get a beer, that action isn't essential to me but neither is it anything distinct from me. And in God's case, his actions result from his having entered time and space and having taken into himself the created₁₃ or created₃ properties (which are subject to created₃ laws) he reveals those actions to have. And both those conditions are necessary

⁴⁷ For this reason it is illegitimate for Bradshaw to to ask (p.172) whether God's energies could have been different from what they are, although it is quite legitimate to ask whether God could have made the cosmos differently from the way he did. As the Creator of all the laws found in the cosmos, God is also the creator of every specific concept of “could” and of the general (nonspecific) idea of “could” which exceeds the specific concepts - the general idea which allows us to ask whether the cosmos *en toto* could have been different. But we cannot legitimately ask the same of God; we cannot ask whether God's energies *could have* been different because there is no concept or idea of “could have” that can apply to God's creating₂₃ them without subjecting the Divine essence to laws which are uncreated₃ and bind God. Of course, God's energies within creation also enjoy freedom, but that is a freedom under laws - as is our own. It is not the same as the apophatic freedom of God's essence.

for his energies to be knowable by us: they must be creaturely to be knowable and revealed to be known. So I fail to see any problem with what Bradshaw admits to be the Cappadocians' position, namely, that God's actions with respect to creatures as well as the characteristics of those actions are *all* the results of his choice and grace. Moreover, they are all really God because the actions are *his* actions and the created₃ properties true of them are ones God has “taken into himself” by his own choice. Thus they comprise what Calvin called “the nature in which God is pleased to manifest himself” and what St Palamas called “a diverse mode of existence” which God “imposed on himself.”

C. More Objections to the C/R View

Earlier we examined some objections to the C/R view offered by Alvin Plantinga, objections concerning the status of the necessary truths of mathematics and logic. Needless to say, that is not the usual objection to be brought against the idea of God as explicated by the essence/energies distinction. More often the objections are closer to Bradshaw's worries. So let's briefly consider a few of these more common objections.

1. Despite what you've said, there must be some original nature to God which explains why he chose the energies he did.

This assumes that God must be like creatures in acting out of a pre-existing nature. It assumes, e.g., that prior to creating he had to have the possibility or potentiality to create, and that prior to taking on the nature “in which he is pleased to manifest himself” he had to have a disposition to take on just that nature. But if pancreation is true, these objections are undercut. There are no possibilities, potentialities, dispositions, kinds, natures, etc., aside from God's having brought them about.⁴⁸ Nor did God have the property being-the-creator-of-the-cosmos until he created the cosmos. That characteristic is essential to God's *relation to us*, but is not one he had to have to be God.

The same reply serves to take care of the protest that if the C/R view is correct then we don't really know *God*. What we know, the criticism goes, is a mask of God. This misses the point that the nature which God has taken on in order to accommodate himself to us is his only nature. There is no other “behind” the accommodation. To say otherwise is to postulate uncreated₃ properties God must have to be God, and to miss the point that the nature God has assumed to himself (“a mode of existence he imposed on himself”) is what he really is and - per his promise - what he swears he will be forever.

2. But if all we have is God's promise that he will always be toward-us what he has

⁴⁸ See J. Ross, “God Creator of Kinds and Possibilities: *requiescant universalia ante res*” in *Rationality, Religious Belief, & Moral Commitment* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1986), 315-334.

willed to be, then we have no guarantee that will not change. On the C/R view, couldn't God change his mind? By contrast, isn't it the case that the AAA view stresses that it is impossible for God to change in any way?

This objection betrays a serious *religious* misunderstanding of the basis for trusting in God. So I begin my reply with some counter-questions: Isn't our belief grounded in the experience of God's reality and of the promises he has made? Isn't our trust ultimately in *him*? Or is our trust grounded in reasons, theories, or logical arguments that purport to prove God cannot go back on his promises? In the latter case, wouldn't we be trusting God on the ground that he is constrained by laws over which he is powerless? And wouldn't it then be those laws in which we've ultimately placed our trust, rather than in God? In other words, wouldn't that mean out ultimate trust is in the logical credit check we've run on God, and that we trust him only because he passed that test?

It is true that on the C/R view the grounds of our faith that God will keep his word is nothing else than that he has "sworn by himself" to do so. There is no greater authority; there is no law or power that can compel him, as it is he who is the creator of everything visible or invisible. So nothing guarantees his promises but his own oath. That is what Luther called "the risk of faith." But this "risk" is not blind trust. The NT stresses that our trust in God's promises which are not yet fulfilled has the same basis as well-placed trust in a spouse or a friend: past promises kept. So, e.g., Heb. 11 gives an extended list of heroes of faith who trusted God to keep his promises and were not disappointed, though they – like us – still await the final promise of the resurrection from the dead. But the point is clear that it is God's past faithfulness that is the grounds of our present trust – not arguments and proofs.

As for the AAA stress on God's unchangeability that, too, is a Platonic misunderstanding of a biblical doctrine. When the scriptures record God as saying "Am I a man that I should repent?" or "I am the Lord, I change not" they are using the idea of changelessness in reference to God's faithfulness to his promises, not as a metaphysical statement about his being. For in ways other than his promises, God can and does change in relation to creatures. That is a point made over and over in the scriptures: he becomes sorry he ever made people prior to sending a great flood; he changes his mind about the death of Hezekiah; he rejoices over sinners when they repent; he visits and redeems his people by coming incarnate in Jesus Christ. On the C/R view, God's being transcends static/dynamic, one/many, temporal/non-temporal, physical/non-physical, and all other dichotomies of created₃ properties, so that God is free to become whatever he wishes. It is a matter of pure grace that his revealed nature has the character it does, not a matter of any necessity he cannot help.

3. Isn't it self-refuting to speak of God's essential being as utterly unknowable? Plantinga, for example, has argued that there can be no reality to which our concepts do

not apply.⁴⁹ Isn't that right? When it is asserted that no concept of God's essential being is possible, isn't *that* a concept being applied to God? The answer is, "No."

It is quite possible to have an *idea* that there is something of which we have no *concept*. To see why this is so, consider the idea: all the numbers no one will ever form a concept of. By having this idea I didn't just form a concept of each and every such number! I still don't know *what* any of those numbers are and any number I do form a concept of is thereby excluded from the class of which I have this idea. Moreover, since there are infinitely many numbers, it is necessarily true that there are numbers no human will ever form a concept of. This shows why it is necessarily true that there are objects of thought of which we can have an idea but of which no one will ever form a concept. So there is nothing in the least self-refuting about the claim that there are realities to which our concepts either do not or cannot apply.

Now it is exactly the latter claim that the C/R position makes about the essential being of God. It says we have the limiting idea *that* God is the unconditionally non-dependent reality all else depends on, while we have no concept of what that being is - in the same way we have no concept of any number in the class numbers no one will ever think of. And for the same reason, saying we cannot conceive of God's uncreated₃ originating being is not self-defeating. Of course, at the same time it is true that we do have concepts of God's energies and their attributes. The C/R claim is not that no one has any concept that truly applies to God. Rather, our claim is a counter-factual: it is that no one *would* have had any concept that truly applies to God had not God accommodated himself to human understanding and revealed (some of) that accommodation. We know God's reality and revealed will by encountering that accommodation in his energies (works) and word. These are the sources of our concepts of those energies and of the revealed truth that there is more to God than just them.

4. How does the doctrine of the Trinity fit into the C/R theology? If the essence of God is unknowable because uncreated₁₂₃ while the energies of God are all uncreated₂ but created₃, how do Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to essence and energies?

On the C/R view all three persons of the Trinity share equally the uncreated₁₂₃ divine essence; they are God replicated three times. But there is dependency among the persons, according to the N.T. The Son is "begotten" of the Father, and the Spirit "proceeds" from the Father. Since both expressions connote dependency the second and third persons of the Trinity are therefore uncreated₁₂ but dependent₃. The Cappadocian term for this was to speak of three "hypostases" of God's essential being. The Trinity is seen, therefore, as another level of divinity between the unknowable essence and the energies of God. Put another way: God has from all eternity freely willed to manifest himself in three persons, and to relate to creatures in that way. It is the persons of the

⁴⁹ *Does God Have A Nature?*, p. 23.

Trinity whose actions and attitudes constitute the divine energies. But even the persons have attributes that are created₃ (and at times created₁) though never created₂. Fatherhood and sonship, one and three, are like consciousness and personhood in that they are all created₃. Were that not the case, those attributes would all have to be uncreated₃ in creatures as well as in God.

Some critics of this position on the trinity have found it unsatisfactory. One such criticism goes like this:

Gregory [Palamas] has set up the divine persons as a kind of intermediary level between the essence and the energies. This is the primary weakness of the Palamite theology. Despite its strong theology of grace, the creature cannot have direct contact with a divine person, only with a person as expressed through an energy.⁵⁰

This, however, misses the mark by reifying the energies into realities distinct from the persons who perform them (making them created₂). By analogy, the objection amounts to saying that if you can't relate to a friend except through what that friend does and says, then it's not really your friend that you know. But your friend's actions are not distinct realities from your friend, rather they just *are* your friend in action. Interacting with what a friend does and says *is* direct contact with that friend and couldn't be anything else. Just so, interacting with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is direct contact with God and nothing less.

IV. Conclusion

Perhaps at this point it may still seem to some readers that my title is an overstatement. Is the theory that identifies Yahweh with Plato's forms really all that bad - bad enough to be called a "fall" parallel to the fall from grace on the part of the first humans? Isn't that harsh hyperbole? But consider the contrast that has just been drawn. The C/R theology makes sense of the biblical teaching of pancreation, explains how God really has the properties he shares with creatures, gives a coherent account of religious language, and holds to sanctification without pantheism. And it does so while acknowledging and affirming the living, variable, relationship every believer experiences in his or her walk with God. Moreover, by recognizing that God is the Creator₂₃ even of the laws of proof, the C/R theology avoids the misguided projects of proving God's existence and of theodicy. Since only what is subject to those laws is the proper object of a proof, the C/R position shows why whatever can be proven would thereby not be God.

⁵⁰ Catherine La Cugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 186.

The AAA view does none of these. By viewing the essence of God as both supremely rational and intelligible, it has fostered countless fruitless attempts to prove his existence and/or justify his inscrutable will. At the same time, the simplicity theory requires that God is identical with all and only perfections, so that God has no attributes that are not identical with his essential being. The result of this position is that God is an abstract property and therefore not an agent. For that reason God cannot truly be said to offer us his love, forgiveness, and everlasting life. In fact, this theory must deny that God has *any* real relation to creatures because God has only perfections and no non-essential properties, which are what his energies are on the C/R view. In other words, since relating to us other than by being logically distinct from us isn't a perfection and can't be essential to God, it can't be true that God relates to us in any non-logical way at all! Listen as Aquinas explains that consequence:

Since God is outside the whole scheme of creation...
it is clear that while creatures are really related to God,
*in God there is no real relation to creatures, but only a
logical one.* However, there is nothing to prevent the
attribution to God of terms implying relationship in
time. They denote a change in creatures not in him...
(*ST*, I a. xiii. 7) (Italics mine)

I do not see how anyone could write those lines and fail to realize that something had gone horribly wrong with the assumptions which led to them. According to such a view it is not true that God loves the world or you and me; it is not true that God rejoices over those who come to know him; it is not true that Abraham was the friend of God or that David was a man after God's own heart; nor could it be true that God was well pleased with Jesus Christ, then withdrew his approval when Christ bore the sins of the world on the cross, and then subsequently exalted him to his own right hand. Worst of all, it entails that God could not really become incarnated in Christ at all! This is because loving, rejoicing, being a friend, being pleased after having been not pleased, and becoming incarnated are all non-essential changes and not static perfections. And the reason for every one of these flat-out denials of plain scriptural teaching is the same: a fall away from pancreation in favor of an attempt to understand Yahweh as the simple unity of Platonic forms.

Please do not misunderstand this as a personal attack on the thinkers of the AAA tradition. It is not. Their writings contain marvelous expositions of scripture, insights into the Christian life, and encouragements to faith – especially the hymns of Aquinas. They also include the corrections of many misunderstandings of Christian teachings and accurate critiques of non-Christian positions. Moreover, I think there can be no doubt that in their lived experience of God they related to him as he has revealed himself rather than as they miscast him in their theories. I'm sure, for example, that in their daily walk and prayer life, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas thought, felt, and acted – thank God! - in the

confidence that God actively related to them in ways that were far more than just being logically distinct from them. But even saints can be mistaken. And when they are, their mistakes can be all the more treacherous for us who are their lesser admirers. For that reason, it is all the more important to identify, understand, and avoid those mistakes. This is why it is necessary to call a fall a fall, and to try our best in our own thinking about God to avoid replacing God's pancreation and grace with anything whatever – including Plato's theory of forms and the hypothesis of simplicity.

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