What Would Augustine Say to Evangelicals Who Reject the Eternal Generation of the Son?

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The early church confessed that Jesus Christ is both consubstantial with and distinct from the Father.[1] The doctrine of the "eternal generation" played an important role in affirming both elements. This doctrine teaches that the Father eternally, necessarily, and incomprehensibly communicates[2] the divine essence to the Son without division or change so that the Son shares an equality of nature with the Father yet is also distinct from the Father.[3] Biblical evidence for eternal generation can be seen in the unique way Scripture presents the Father/Son relationship (especially in the Gospel of John).

Although the eternal generation of the Son is affirmed by all pro-Nicene theologians and included in early ecumenical creeds (as well as many post-Reformation confessions), this doctrine has been rejected as speculative, unbiblical, and philosophically problematic by several prominent evangelical theologians.[4] As one theologian explains, "It appears to me that the concept of eternal generation does not have biblical warrant and does not make sense philosophically. As such, we should eliminate it from theological discussions of the Trinity."[5]

The purpose of this essay is to make a constructive case for the eternal generation of the Son by considering how Augustine of Hippo might respond to contemporary critics of this doctrine. In conversation with Augustine, I will argue that "eternal generation"—properly construed—provides a helpful way of explicating biblical teaching regarding the relationship of the Son to the Father and should be seen as an integral element of an evangelical doctrine of the Trinity.

Why Augustine? Not only is Augustine's teaching on the Trinity by far the most influential in the history of the West,[6] but despite popular portrayals to the contrary, his Trinitarian doctrine also shares much in common with the Greek-speaking theologians of the East (e.g., the Cappadocians).[7] In turning to Augustine, one draws upon what is arguably

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the most representative version of Trinitarian doctrine in the history of the church among Protestants and Catholics. Although Augustine's explanation of eternal generation may lack the theological and philosophical precision found in later formulations of this doctrine (e.g., medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas or post-Reformation scholastics like Francis Turretin and John Owen), his writings offer a helpful window in the biblical and theological foundations for eternal generation.[8]

In the first section, I will summarize recent criticisms of eternal generation. Next, I will explore Augustine's explanation of and biblical arguments for the eternal generation of the Son. I will show that this doctrine emerges from substantive engagement with Scripture and is essential to a biblical understanding of the work of divine persons in creation, providence, and redemption. Finally, I will consider how Augustine might respond to contemporary critics.

EVANGELICAL CRITICISMS OF ETERNAL GENERATION

Evangelicals who reject eternal generation typically cite four reasons. First, they insist that eternal generation is a speculative doctrine that lacks biblical support.[9] Texts allegedly supporting this doctrine (e.g., Prov 8:22-25; Ps 2:7; Heb 1:5; John 5:26; and Col 1:15) have simply been misread by proponents of eternal generation.[10] In addition, this doctrine is dependent upon the mistranslation of the Greek term *monogenes* as "only begotten."[11] Furthermore, passages that speak of "begetting" (e.g., Ps 2:7) refer to the incarnation and not the eternal relation of the Son to the Father. As Millard Erickson explains, "I would propose that there are no references to the Father begetting the Son or the Father (and the Son) sending the Spirit that cannot be understood in terms of the temporal role assumed by the second and third persons of the Trinity respectively. They do not indicate any intrinsic relationships among the three."[12] The title "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15 does not provide evidence for eternal generation but simply indicates Christ's "preeminence" as Lord of creation.[13] Similarly, the biblical title "Son" does not imply a divine begetting but merely signifies "likeness" or "equality."[14] In sum, "Scripture provides little to no clear warrant for the speculation that the Nicene fathers made the bedrock for distinguishing properties of the Father and the Son."[15]

Second, these critics assert that eternal generation makes no sense: "It must be acknowledged," explains Millard Erickson, "that for many persons today, the doctrine does not seem to make much sense."[16] Similarly, J. Oliver Buswell asserts that "begotten not made" is meaningless.[17]

Third, evangelical critics insist that the doctrine of eternal generation opens to door to ontological subordinationism. William Lane Craig expresses this objection forcefully: "For although creedally affirmed, the doctrine of the generation of the Son (and the procession of the Spirit) is a relic of Logos Christology which finds virtually no warrant in the biblical text and introduces a subordinationism into the Godhead which anyone who affirms the full deity of Christ ought to find very troubling."[18] Although it was not the intent of those who affirmed eternal generation to subordinate the Son to the Father, Craig insists that the Son's status is ineluctably diminished when he "becomes an effect contingent upon the Father."[19] Similar criticisms are leveled by Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears,[20] Millard Erickson,[21] Paul Helm,[22] Lorianne Boettner,[23] and Robert Reymond.[24] The assumption behind this criticism is that positing any kind of "derivation" in the Father/Son relationship *necessarily* introduces ontological subordination into the divine life.

Finally, evangelicals who reject eternal generation maintain that this doctrine is not necessary in order to distinguish the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Fundamental to orthodox Trinitarian theology is the notion that the Father is not the Son and Son is not the Father. Pro-Nicene theologians argued that what makes the Son distinct from the Father is the fact that the Son is eternally begotten by the Father and what

makes the Father distinct from the Son is the fact that the Father eternally begot the Son.[25] If one drops eternal generation, how does one distinguish the persons? Craig explains that one should not attempt to ground the distinction of divine persons in intra-Trinitarian relations. Instead, one must recognize that the economic Trinity (God's self-revelation in the economy of salvation) should be clearly distinguished from the immanent Trinity (God apart from creation and redemption). The divine persons are distinct simply as knowing and loving agents. According to Craig, the specific roles they each play in the economy of salvation "may well be arbitrary."[26] The "Father" is simply the one who sends. The "Son" is whichever one is sent. The "Spirit" is the one who continues the ministry of the Son. There is nothing intrinsic to intra-Trinitarian relations necessitating that the one the Bible designates as "Son" would in fact be the one who is sent.[27] John Feinberg also affirms that the divine persons may be distinguished merely on the basis of their economic roles.[28] Wayne Grudem suggests that distinctions among the divine persons are grounded in differing "roles."[29] Like Feinberg and Craig, Grudem appeals to differing economic "roles" to distinguish the persons. However, unlike Craig, Grudem does not believe that the relational patterns manifested in the economy of salvation are arbitrary. To the contrary, he insists that the economic "roles" of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit directly reflect their eternal "roles." For example, the Father/Son relation is constituted by "roles" of authority and submission in such a way that the Father eternally has authority over the Son while the Son eternally submits to the Father.[30] Having considered objections to eternal generation, we will now examine Augustine's explanation.

ETERNAL GENERATION IN AUGUSTINE'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Augustine was not the first to articulate a doctrine of eternal generation as a way of explicating the relation of the Son to the Father.[31] To the contrary, eternal generation is a central feature of pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology (Latin and Greek).[32] The inclusion of this doctrine in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed reflects this reality.[33] There are three questions we will consider below. What is eternal generation? What biblical and theological evidence does Augustine marshal for this doctrine? What role does eternal generation play in Augustine's theology?

UNDERSTANDING ETERNAL GENERATION

Augustine's exposition of John 5:26 in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* offers a helpful window into his understanding of eternal generation.[34] "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26, ESV). What does it mean, asks Augustine, that the Father has "life in himself" (John 5:26a)? It means that the Father's "life" is completely unlike human "life."[35] Whereas the life of the soul is "mutable" and dependent, the life of God is "immutable" and dependent on nothing outside God (*Tract.* 19.8, 149).[36] In this text, we are told that the Son possesses a form of "life" identical to that of the Father—"life in himself" (John 5:26b).[37] The Father and Son, however, possess "life in himself" in distinct ways. The Son possesses "life in himself" that has been "given" to him while the Father possesses "life in himself" that was given by no one.

How, Augustine asks, did the Son receive "life in himself"? His answer is both simple and profound: the Father "begat" the Son.[38] "For it is not that he was without life and received life; but he is life by a 'being born.' The Father is life, not by a 'being born'; the Son is life by a 'being born.' The Father [is] from no Father; the Son, from God the Father" (*Tract.* 19.13, 152). Augustine explains that the phrase "has been given" (John 5:26b) is roughly equivalent in meaning to "has been begotten" (*Tract.* 19.13, 152).[39] Here we see Augustine appealing to eternal generation in

order to explicate the theological judgment this text renders regarding the relation of the Son to the Father.[40] On the one hand, the "life" which the Son "receives" is identical to the "life" the Father possesses. On the other hand, the Father and Son possess this "life" in differing ways: "Therefore, the Father remains life, the Son also remains life; the Father, life in himself, not from the Son, the Son, life in himself, but from the Father. [The Son was] begotten by the Father to be life in himself, but the Father [is] life in himself, unbegotten" (*Tract.* 19.13, 153). In a beautiful turn of phrase, Augustine exhorts his readers to "[h]ear the Father through the Son. Rise, receive life that in him who has life in himself you may receive life which you do not have in yourself" (*Tract.* 19.13, 153).

Augustine's account of eternal generation includes several important elements. First, the generation of the Son is incorporeal and should not be understood in the manner of human generation. Unfortunately, some people make the mistake of "transfer[ing] what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things …" (*De trin.* I.1, 65). Second, the generation of the Son is timeless.[41] Through generation, "the Father bestows being on the Son *without any beginning in time*" (*De trin.* XV.47, 432, italics added). Thus, the Son is coeternal with the Father.[42] Third, the Son is begotten by the Father in an equality of nature. The Father did not beget a "lesser Son" who would eventually become his equal. Commenting on John 5:26, Augustine explains that the Father "begot [the Son] timelessly in such a way that the *life* which the Father gave the Son by begetting him is co-eternal with the *life* of the Father who gave it …" (*De trin.* XV.47, 432, italics added). Through generation the Son receives the "life"—that is, the nature or substance—of the Father.[43] Fourth, the Son is begotten not by the *will* of the Father but rather of the *substance* of the Father (*De trin.* XV.38, 425).[44] Fifth, a likeness to the generation of the Son can be found in the nature of "light."[45] We should not think of the generation of the Son like "water flowing out from a hole in the ground or in the rock, but like light flowing from light" (*De trin.* IV.27, 172).[46] The Son's "light" is equal in its radiance to "light" of the Father.[47] Finally, the generation of the Son is incomprehensible.[48]

AUGUSTINE'S ARGUMENT FOR ETERNAL GENERATION

One might assume that Augustine's commitment to eternal generation is merely rooted in a handful of isolated "proof texts." Nothing could be further from the truth. This doctrine is rooted in a comprehensive Trinitarian hermeneutic. In *De trinitate*, Augustine outlines several "canonical rules" to help believers rightly read Scripture in its witness to Christ. His first "rule" concerns a distinction between two ways that Scripture speaks about Christ. When reading Scripture, we must distinguish between the Son in the "form of God" and the Son in the "form of a servant."[49] In the form of God, Christ created all things (John 1:3) while in the form of a servant he was born of a woman (Gal 4:4). In the form of God, he is equal to the Father (John 10:30) while in the form of a servant he obeys the Father (John 6:38). In the form of God, he is "true God" (1 John 5:20) while in the form of a servant he is obedient to the point of death (Phil 2:8). These two "forms" exist in one person (*De trin.* I.28, 86).

Augustine explains that the distinction between the Son in the "form of a servant" and the Son in the "form of God" is inadequate to explain a number of passages which speak of the Son neither as "less" than the Father nor "equal" to the Father, but rather indicate that the Son is "from" the Father. A second "rule" must be applied to these texts: "This then is the rule which governs many scriptural texts, intended to show not that one person is less than the other, but only that one is from the other" (*De trin.*, II.3, 99). We might refer to this as Augustine's "from another" rule. He explicitly cites John 5:19 and John 5:26 as exemplars of this rule. "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For what-

ever the Father does, that the Son does likewise" (John 5:19, ESV). "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26, ESV). Commenting on these verses, Augustine explains, "So the reason for these statements can only be that the life of the Son is unchanging like the Father's, and yet is from the Father [5:26]; and that the work of Father and Son is indivisible, and yet the Son's working is from the Father just as he himself is from the Father [5:19]; and the way in which the Son sees the Father is simply by being the Son" (*De trin.*, II.3, 99).[50] Combining Augustine's rules, New Testament references to Christ can be grouped into three categories: (1) texts which refer to Son in the "form of God" in which he is equal to the Father (e.g., Phil 2:6; John 10:30); (2) texts which refer to the Son in the "form of a servant" in which he is "less" than the Father (e.g., John 14:28); and (3) texts which suggest that the Son is "from" the Father (e.g., John 5:19; 5:26).[51]

It is helpful to observe what is going on. Augustine (rightly) assumes that significant continuity exists between God's inner life and God's actions in creation and redemption.[52] As a result, relational patterns in the economy of salvation reflect relational patterns in God's inner life. Notice how this assumption is reflected in Augustine's reading of John 5. The reason the Son can do nothing of himself (John 5:19) is because the Son is not (so to speak) "from himself" (John 5:26). This is why the Son's "working" (which is indivisible with the Father) comes *from* the Father.

There is much to commend Augustine's reading of John 5:26. D. A. Carson makes a compelling case in support of Augustine's reading of this text. It will be helpful to quote him at length:

A full discussion of John 5:26 could demonstrate that it most plausibly reads as an *eternal grant* from the Father to the Son, a grant that inherently transcends time and stretches Jesus' Sonship into eternity past. When Jesus says that the Father has "life in himself," the most natural meaning is

that this refers to God's self-existence. He is not dependent on anyone or anything. Then Jesus states that God, who has "life in himself," "has granted the Son to have life in himself." This is conceptually far more difficult. If Jesus had said that the Father, who has "life in himself," had granted to the Son to have life, there would be no conceptual difficulty, but of course the Son would then be an entirely secondary and derivative being. What was later called the doctrine of the Trinity would be ruled out. Alternatively, if Jesus had said that the Father has "life in himself" and the Son has "life in himself," there would be no conceptual difficulty, but it would be much more difficult to rule out ditheism. In fact what Jesus says is that the Father has "life in himself" and He has *granted* to the Son to have "life in himself." The expression "life in himself" must mean the same thing in both parts of the verse. But how can such "life in himself," the life of self-existence, be granted by another? The ancient explanation is still the best one: This is an eternal grant. There was therefore never a time when the Son did not have "life in himself." This eternal grant establishes the nature of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. But if this is correct, since Father and Son have always been in this relationship, the Sonship of Jesus is not restricted to the days of His flesh.[53]

Evangelicals who reject eternal generation typically counter that John 5:26b refers exclusively to the economic working on the incarnate Son.**[54]** In response, it should be noted that many of the same theologians who deny that the language of "grant" (John 5:26) makes a metaphysical claim about the eternal relation of the Son to the Father frequently read verse 26 as making a metaphysical claim about the "self-existence" of the Father *and* the Son. John Feinberg represents a case in point. On the one hand, he claims that John 5:26 makes a metaphysical claim not only about the self-existence of the Father but also the Son.[55] That is to say, he reads both instances of "life in himself"

metaphysically. On the other hand, in rejecting eternal generation,[56] he implicitly denies that the language of "grant" has any metaphysical implications. There is an inconsistency here. "Life in himself" is read metaphysically (both in relation to the Father and the Son) while "grant" is read only economically. This inconsistency begs for an explanation. The question is not whether verse 26, in the broader context of John 5, describes the economic working of the Father and Son. Surely it does. Rather we must ask whether this adequately captures *all* John 5:26 affirms about the life-giving power of the Son. As Marianne Meye Thompson explains, "The life-giving prerogative [v. 26] does not remain external to the Son. He does not receive it merely as a mission to be undertaken. It is not simply some power he has been given. Rather, the Son partakes of the very life of the Father …"[57] The affirmation that Jesus has "life in himself" is made in the context of the conviction that there is but one God. Thus, Jesus does not represent a "second source of life, standing alongside the Father."[58] To the contrary, he possesses "life in himself" precisely because the Father "granted" it.[59] This is why the incarnate Son is able to raise the dead (John 5:25).[60] As Augustine explains, "For the Father has life everlasting in himself, and unless he begot such a Son as had life in himself, then the Son would not also give life to whom he would wish, as the Father raises the dead and gives them life" (*Tract.* 19.13, 153).

Although he offers traditional readings of many texts typically cited in support of eternal generation (e.g., Prov 8:22-25; Ps 2:7, etc),[61] it is Augustine's "from-another" rule that constitutes the hermeneutical linchpin to his argument.[62] One might wonder what biblical evidence supports this "rule." Earlier I noted that significant continuity exists for Augustine between God's inner life and God's self-revelation in creation and redemption. This leads Augustine to draw inferences about God's inner life on the basis of relational patterns expressed in the economy of salvation. We will briefly examine five lines of biblical evidence.

The first group of passages includes the numerous "sending" texts scattered throughout the New Testament (e.g., Matt 10:40; Luke 4:43; 10:16; Gal 4:4-6). A high concentration of these passages can be found in the Gospel of John (e.g., John 4:34; 5:23-24, 30-47; 6:38-44, 57; 7:16, 28-29, 33; 8:16-18, 26-29, 42; 9:4; 12:44-50; 13:16; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5, 28; 17:3, 18; 20:21). In these texts, Jesus designates the Father as "the one who sent me":

- "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 5:23).
- "For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36).
- "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).
- "I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me" (John 7:29).
- "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me" (John 7:33).
- "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me" (John 8:42).
- "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (John 13:20).
- "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).
- "For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me" (John 17:8).

Augustine discusses the sending of the Son at length in Books II-IV of *De trinitate* and argues that the temporal sending of the Son reflects the Son's relation of being eternally "from" the Father: "So the Word of God is sent by him whose Word

he is; sent by him he is born of. The begetter sends, and what is begotten is sent" (*De trin.*, IV.28, 173). One might wonder how "sending" texts can count as evidence for the eternal generation of the Son. After all, John the Baptist was "sent" by God (John 1:6) yet we do not infer the divinity of John the Baptist from the fact he was "sent." This criticism misunderstands the theological significance of the "sending" passages. The passages cited above do not constitute evidence for the "divinity" of Christ (an "essential" predication). Rather, they shed light on the unique nature of the Son's relationship to the Father ("personal" predication). Returning to John 1, although John the Baptist and Jesus are both presented as "agents" of God, it is clear they are not agents in the same way. To the contrary, the agencies of John and Jesus are explicitly contrasted on the basis "of the status or rank of the two."[63] John the Baptist (who is "not the light") functions merely as a human agent (cf. John 1:4-5, 8, 15, 30) whereas Jesus is a divine (and human) agent whose working is identified with that of the Father (John 1:1-3, 14).[64] Once we recognize that Jesus is a divine agent who is equal to the Father, then we must ask what his unique sending reveals about his relationship to the Father. It is precisely in this context that the sending passages cited above offer a window into the nature of the Son's eternal relation to the Father.

A second line of evidence includes passages that speak of the Father "giving" and the Son "receiving" (e.g., John 5:19, 22, 26, 27, 36; 10:18; 17:2, 8, 11, 22; 18:11). Although a number of these giving/ receiving texts can be explained on the basis of the "form-of-a-servant" rule (e.g., John 5:22, 27; Phil 2:9), Augustine insists that *some* necessarily refer to the eternal relation of the Son to the Father (*De trin.* I.29, 87). For example, when John 5:26 affirms that the Father has granted the Son to have "life in himself," this must be understood in terms of the "from another" rule. John 5:19 should also be interpreted on the basis of the "from another" rule.[65] John 7:16 ("My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me") represents a borderline case.[66]

It could be understood either according to the "form-of-a-servant" rule or the "from-another" rule (*De trin.* II.4, 99). If understood in terms of the "from-another" rule, "*My teaching is not mine but his who sent me* (John 7:16) may be reduced to 'I am not from myself but from him who sent me'" (*De trin* II.4, 100).

A third group would include passages that reflect an ordered equality that constitutes the working of the Father and Son (John 1:1-3, 10; 5:19, 21; 14:6; Rom 5:1, 11; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph 1:3-14; 2:18; 4:6; Col 1:16; 3:17; Heb 1:1-2; Jude 25). One place this ordered equality can be clearly seen is creation. For example, reading 1 Cor 8:6 alongside John 1:3, Augustine explains that the Father created all things *through* the Son (*De trin.* I.12, 72). This reflects a broader scriptural pattern—namely, that the Father works all things through the Son (and in the Spirit).[67] This pattern is reflected in the prepositions associated with the work of the Father and Son. For example, 1 Corinthians 8:6 presents the Father as the one "from whom" all things exist while the Son is named as the one "through whom" all things exist.[68] Augustine offers a Trinitarian reading of Romans 11:36a ("For from him and through him and to him are all things") associating the individual propositions with each of the divine persons. Even if one questions the exegetical appropriateness of a Trinitarian reading of Romans 11:36 (a possibility Augustine acknowledges), one cannot deny the broader pattern. An ordered equality can also be seen in the way the blessings of salvation reach us: from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.[69] This pattern can be seen in Ephesians 1:3-14. The Father, as *principium*, is the ultimate source of the blessings of salvation. These blessings are purchased *through* the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and flow to believers through union with him (hence, Paul's emphasis upon the blessings being "in Christ"). The Holy Spirit, in turn, brings believers into possession of the blessings that Christ has purchased.

Although Augustine does not develop this as a separate argument for eternal generation, a

fourth group of passages includes those that use the names "Father" and "Son" (e.g., Matt 11:27; 24:36-39; 28:18; Gal 4:4-6). Like the "sending" texts cited above, a high concentration of these passages can be found in the Gospel of John (e.g., John 1:14; 3:35; 5:17-47; 6:40; 14:13; 17:1). Critics of eternal generation assert that the title "Son" only implies the "equality" of the Son to the Father in the New Testament and does not indicate anything regarding the mode by which he eternally exists.[70] This argument, however, commits the fallacy of the excluded middle: "Son" must refer either to "equality" or "origin" but not both. For Augustine, "Son" implies both equality *and* origin. In the process of responding to his "Arian" opponents,[71] Augustine argues that "begotten" simply means the same thing as "son": "Being son is a consequence of being begotten, and being begotten is implied by being son" (*De trin*. V.8, 193).[72] If "Son" only means "equality," then we find ourselves in the odd place where the biblical name "Son" appears to tell us nothing about the eternal distinction between the Son and the Father.

A final group of texts supporting the eternal generation of the Son comes from an unlikely source—passages about the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Son (and Father). It might be argued that much of the biblical material cited above (e.g., the "sending" passages) could be explained simply by appealing to *incarnation* of the Son. This argument, however, cannot be made in the case of the Holy Spirit. In other words, one cannot say that Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit being "sent" because the Holy Spirit became incarnate. Similarly, one cannot say that the Holy Spirit "receives" from the Father and Son because he took on flesh.[73] After reminding his readers that the Holy Spirit did not take on the "form of a servant" like the Son, Augustine cites John 16:13-14. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and

declare it to you" (John 16:13–14, ESV). Reading this text alongside John 15:26,[74] Augustine explains that the reason the Holy Spirit does not "speak on his own" is because, like the Son, he is not "from himself." Rather, the Holy Spirit speaks as one "proceeding from the Father" (*De trin*. II.5, 100). Similarly, the reason the Holy Spirit "glorifies" the Son (John 16:14) is because he "receives" from the Son—just as the Son glorifies the Father because he "receives" from the Father (*De trin*. II.6, 100). My point is not to attempt to prove the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father and Son. Rather, I simply want to point out (1) that these Holy Spirit passages constitute additional evidence for Augustine's "from another" hermeneutical rule and (2) that one cannot dismiss all the biblical evidence cited earlier merely by appealing to the incarnation.

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ETERNAL GENERATION

The generation of the Son (along with the procession of the Holy Spirit) plays a central role in Augustine's Trinitarian theology. First, eternal generation provides the basis both for the equality of the Son to the Father as well as the distinction between the Father and the Son. One of Augustine's central concerns in *De trinitate* is affirming the unity and equality of the Father and the Son. On the one hand, because "the Father has begotten the Son as his equal," the Father and Son share the same nature (*De trin*. I.29, 88). On the other hand, eternal generation constitutes the basis for the distinction between the Father and the Son. At the beginning of Book I, Augustine offers a helpful summary of Latin (pro-Nicene) teaching on the Trinity. After affirming that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three gods but one God because they exist "in the inseparable equality of one substance," Augustine turns to the distinction of persons: "although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and *therefore* he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and *therefore* he who is the Son is not the Father

…" (*De trin*. I.7, 69, italics added). Notice how "begetting" constitutes the basis for affirming the distinction between the Father and the Son.

Closely related to the previous point, the perichoretic communion that exists among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is rooted in the Father's generative act. Lewis Ayres explains that in the decade between 410 and 420, Augustine moves "towards a sophisticated account of the divine communion" in which "the Trinitarian life is founded in the Father's activity as the one from whom the Son is eternally born and the Spirit proceeds."[75] Thus, in his mature theology, Augustine presents Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as "an ordered communion of equals established by the Father."[76] On the one hand, each of the divine persons is "irreducible" and possesses the "fullness of God."[77] On the other hand, "[Augustine] consistently founds the unity of God in the Father's eternal act of giving rise to a communion in which the mutual love of the three constitutes their unity of substance."[78] In this context, we might say that eternal generation names the mode of communion that exists between the Father and Son.[79]

Third, the eternal generation of the Son constitutes the ontological basis for his temporal mission. Augustine's opponents argued that the sending of the Son reveals his "inferiority" to the Father on the grounds that the one who sends must, of necessity, be "greater" than one who is sent (*De trin*. II.7, 101). Augustine labors to show that "being sent" does not imply any inferiority on the part of the Son. It simply reveals that the Son is *from* the Father.[80] One might say that the sending of the Son represents a temporal echo of his generation by the Father in eternity.[81]

Finally, the generation of the Son grounds the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in creation, providence, and redemption.[82] Augustine's mature account of Trinitarian operation involves two elements.[83] On the one hand, the working of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is "inseparably" the work of the three *ad extra* (God's work outside himself).[84] On the other hand, in this single act, the divine persons work according to their relative properties *ad intra* (God's work internal to himself).[85] The Father acts with the other divine persons according to his mode of being "from no one" (unbegotten). The Son acts with the other divine persons according to his mode of being "from the Father" (generation). The Spirit acts with the other divine persons according to his mode of being "from the Father and the Son" (procession). Combining these two elements we might say that the divine persons act inseparably through the intra-Trinitarian *taxis*: from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. We can see this dynamic clearly in Augustine's discussion of the work of the divine persons in creation. Genesis 1 teaches that God created light. What light did the Son create? It certainly cannot be a different light. Rather, it must be the same light: "Therefore, we understand that the light was made by God the Father, but through the Son" (*Tract*. 20.7, 170). Similarly, the Father created the earth. The Son did not create another world by "watching" the Father. On the contrary, the world was created by the Father *through* the Son. Summarizing his discussion of the creative work of the triune God, Augustine explains, "The Father [made] the world, the Son [made] the world, the Holy Spirit [made] the world. If [there are] three gods, [there are] three worlds; if [there is] one God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, one world was made by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit." (*Tract*. 20.9, 172).

WHAT WOULD AUGUSTINE SAY TO EVANGELICALS WHO REJECT ETERNAL GENERATION?

Having examined Augustine's teaching, we are now in a position to consider how the Latin doctor might respond to evangelicals who reject eternal generation. First, although Augustine would agree that the ultimate issue is whether or not Scripture affirms eternal generation,[86] he would express surprise and dismay that some evangelicals would ignore the clear conciliar teaching of the church

(e.g., Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed). Before dismissing this as misguided Catholic rhetoric, we need to remember that the Reformers did not abandon "tradition." Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity. As Richard Muller explains, "The ancient creeds, namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creed, plus the decision of the Council of Ephesus and the formula of Chalcedon, are consistent guides for the Reformed orthodox in their identification of fundamental teachings of the faith, in the establishment for a foundation for catechesis (here the Apostles' Creed is of course most prominent), and in their formulation of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Person of Christ."[87] What the Reformers opposed was tradition as a separate source of revealed truth standing alongside Scripture.[88] As Kevin Vanhoozer reminds us, *sola scriptura* must not be confused with "solo" *scriptura*.[89] The early creeds are not a hindrance to understanding Scripture but help us rightly read Scripture in its witness to the triune God.

Second, Augustine would point out that evangelical rejection of eternal generation is rooted in a narrow reading of Scripture and deficient Trinitarian hermeneutic.[90] The biblical evidence for eternal generation is far broader than a handful of isolated texts. It includes numerous passages that offer a window into the Father/Son relationship including "sending" texts, "giving/receiving" texts, texts reflecting an ordered equality between the Father and Son, the names "Father" and "Son," and even texts regarding the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Son. Moreover, the truth of this doctrine does not depend on the translation of *monogenes* as "only begotten" (as some critics wrongly assume).

Third, although Augustine would resonate with concern about introducing ontological subordination into the immanent life of the triune God, he would insist that eternal generation actually supports the ontological equality of the Son to the Father. For Augustine, the equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is reflected in "the inseparable equality of the one substance" (*De trin.* I.7, 69).[91]

The equality of the divine persons is also reflected in the fact that they work "inseparably."[92] Although some forms of "generation" may be subordinationist, Augustine's account is not.[93] On the contrary, eternal generation constitutes a key element of his argument for the ontological *equality* of the Son to the Father on the assumption that like "begets" like. It is crucial to recognize that the "creator/creature" distinction provides theological context for Augustine's affirmation of eternal generation. Those who subordinate the Son to the Father do so not merely by affirming that the Son is "from" by the Father but by construing the generation of the Son in terms of creation and locating the Son on the "creature" side of creator/creature distinction.[94]

Fourth, Augustine would insist that some evangelical arguments against eternal generation undermine the reliability of divine revelation.[95] This problem can be seen most acutely in the case of William Lane Craig who claims that we must sharply distinguish the economic revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (economic Trinity) from the inner life of the divine persons (immanent Trinity) with the result that the roles assumed by the divine persons in the economy of salvation are arbitrary and reveal nothing regarding their personal properties. In making this argument, Craig effectively severs the economic Trinity from the immanent Trinity.[96] In contrast to Craig, Augustine (rightly) affirms that patterns of divine relation in the economy of salvation echo and exhibit eternal relations among the divine persons. The economy of salvation (constituted by the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit) is not *merely* a record of the actions undertaken by God to save us. It is also designed to teach us about God. As Fred Sanders explains, "God has given form and order to the history of salvation because he intends not only to save us through it but also to reveal himself through it. The economy is shaped by God's intention to communicate his identity and character."[97] Thus, when the Son and Holy Spirit appear, they behave as they truly are: "their eternal personalities, we might say, are exhibited

here in time."[98] This can be clearly seen in the case of the economic working of the Son.[99] The temporal "sending" of the Son reveals his filial mode of being "from" the Father for all eternity. On Craig's account, however, the temporal missions are simply willed acts that in no direct way reflect God's inner life (i.e., the "personal properties" of the divine persons).[100]

Fifth, Augustine would legitimately press evangelicals who reject eternal generation with the following question: "How do you distinguish the Son from the Father without lapsing into modalism or tritheism?"[101] Simply asserting that Father and Son are "persons" is not adequate.[102] One of the fundamental elements of orthodox teaching on the Trinity throughout the history of the church is that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. For Augustine (and all other pro-Nicenes) the reason that the Son is distinct from the Father is because the Son is "begotten" by the Father.[103] Some evangelicals suggest that the distinction of persons can be grounded exclusively in the economic activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because the divine persons act conjointly in creation, providence, and redemption, there are significant theological problems with grounding the distinction of persons *exclusively* in the economy of salvation.[104]

Finally, Augustine would invite evangelicals who insist that eternal generation "makes no sense" to reflect more carefully on the nature of theological language and the profound theological "sense" of this doctrine. At the beginning of Book V, Augustine explains that "when we think about God the trinity we are aware that our thoughts are quite inadequate to their object, and incapable of grasping him as he is ..." (*De trin.* V.1, 189). Although we should always be praising God, "yet no words of ours are capable of expressing him..." (*De trin.* V.1, 189). Whatever we say about God's unchanging nature "cannot be measured by the standard of things visible, changeable, mortal, and deficient" (*De trin.* V.1, 189). In light of this, Augustine would insist that "incomprehensibility"

should not be limited to the manner of the Son's generation but should qualify all our thinking about God.[105]

ENDNOTES

[1] Apart from a few minor changes, this essay was published previously in *Trinity Journal* 32 (2011): 141-163. Reprinted with permission.

[2] The term "communicates" is crucial. Fundamental to the definition offered above is the Trinitarian distinction between "person" and "essence." As Zacharias Ursinus explains, "The sum of this distinction between the terms Essence and Person, as applied to God is this: Essence is absolute and communicable—Person is relative and incommunicable." Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (4th ed.; trans G. W. Willard; Cincinnati: Elm Street, 1888), 130. The essence of the Son is not "generated." It is communicated. What is "generated" is the personal subsistence of the Son.

[3] "[G]eneration is a communication of the divine essence, whereby only the second person of the Deity derives and takes from the first person alone, as a son from a father, the same essence whole and entire, which the father has and retains." Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 136. Generation must be distinguished from creation, "which implies the production of something out of nothing by the command and will of God" (136). Berkhof offers a similar definition of eternal generation: "It is that eternal and necessary act of the first person in the Trinity, whereby He, within the divine Being, is the ground of a second personal subsistence like His own, and puts this second person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation, or change." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 94.

[4] Pro-Nicene theology is not merely a reassertion of the teaching of Nicaea. It represents an interpretation of Nicaea that emerged in the second half of the fourth century that centered on common nature, common power, and common operations. In context of a clear distinction between "person" and

"nature," pro-Nicenes affirmed that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the same power, perform the same works, and possess the same nature. See Michel R. Barnes, "One Nature, One power: Consensus Doctrine in Pro-Nicene Polemic," in *Studia Patristica,* vol. 29, *Historica, Theologica et Philosophica, Critica et Philologica* (ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone; Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 205-23; and Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 236-40.

[5]Millard Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 251.

[6]Not everyone views Augustine's influence as positive. According to critics like Colin Gunton, Cornelius Plantinga, and Catherina LaCugna, Augustine's theology "begins" with a unity of divine substance (which he allegedly "prioritizes" over the persons), his Trinitarian reflection is over-determined by neo-Platonic philosophy, his psychological "analogy" tends toward modalism, and he severs the life of the triune God from the economy of salvation by focusing on the immanent Trinity. Lewis Ayres and Michel Barnes, however, have convincingly demonstrated that these criticisms are based on fundamental misreadings of Augustine's theology. See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); idem, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. Dodaro and George Lawless; New York: Routledge, 2000) 51-76; Michel R. Barnes, "Rereading Augustine's theology of the Trinity," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O'Collins; New York: Oxford, 1999), 145-76.

[7]Many contemporary histories of the development of Trinitarian doctrine proceed from the unwarranted assumption that significant differences exist between early "Western" approaches (which emphasize divine unity) and early "Eastern" approaches (which emphasize a trinity of divine persons). This problematic assumption can be traced to the work of a nineteenth-century Jesuit, Théodore de Régnon.

Trenchant criticisms of this polarizing paradigm can be found in Michel R. Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51-79; idem, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237-50.

[8]Because of his role as "Doctor of the Church" (*doctor ecclesiae*), medieval theologians treated Augustine as a reliable authority whose teaching on the Trinity may be employed as foundational elements in theological argumentation because they are seen as faithful expressions of Scripture and conciliar teaching. This is not to suggest that Augustine's doctrinal statements possessed the same kind of authority as Scripture. Rather they possessed a "probable" authority—something less than the ultimate authority of Holy Scripture but certainly much more than untested theological opinions. This medieval practice offers an apt analogy for my engagement with Augustine's Trinitarian theology in this essay.

[9]"The whole attempt to define the eternal relations in the immanent or ontological Trinity seems misguided. First, God has given us no revelation of the nature of their eternal relations. We should follow the command of the Bible: 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God' and refuse to speculate." Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 27-28.

[10]See John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 490; Lorraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (9th ed.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 121.

[11]Commenting on the lack of evidence that *monogenes* means "only begotten," Feinberg explains, "In light of this evidence, it is clear that a major biblical support for the eternal generation doctrine evaporates." Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 491; Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1233-34; J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 111.

[12]Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 309. See also Feinberg, *No One Like*

Him, 490.

[13]Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 491; Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, 113.

[14]Ibid., 112-14. "What underlies the conception of sonship in Scriptural speech is just 'likeness'; whatever the father is that the son is also." Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (ed., Samuel G. Craig; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 52.

[15]Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (2nd ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 325-26. Similarly, "[W]e can say with confidence that the Bible has nothing whatsoever to say about 'begetting' as an eternal relationship between the Father and the Son." Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 111.

[16]Erickson, *Tampering with the Trinity*, 182.

[17]Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 112; Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 488; Erickson, *Tampering with the Trinity*, 251; and Driscoll and Breshears, *Doctrine*, 28.

[18]William Lane Craig, "A Formulation and Defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity," 15. Unabridged version of chapter 29 from *Philosophical Foundations of a Christian Worldview* (ed. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

[19]Craig, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 16.

[20]Driscoll and Breshears, *Doctrine*, 28.

[21]Erickson, *Tampering with the Trinity*, 251; idem, *God in Three Persons*, 309-10.

[22]Paul Helm, "Of God and of the Holy Trinity: A Response to Dr. Beckwith," *Churchman* 115 (2001): 350.

[23]Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, 122.

[24]Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 326.

[25]Other elements of pro-Nicene theology include an assumption that there are no degrees of divinity, that the divine persons are distinct yet possess the same nature apart from any ontological hierarchy, and that the generation of the Son by the Father takes place within the being of God and involves no division of being. See Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 236, 434. Representatives of pro-Nicene theology include Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, and Ambrose of Milan.

[26]Craig, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 17

[27]Ibid., 18. Without asserting that the roles of the divine persons are arbitrary, Millard Erickson also sharply distinguishes the economic Trinity from the immanent Trinity. Apart from their roles in the economy of salvation, Erickson never really explains how the persons are distinct. He simply claims that "an eternal symmetry" exists among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 310.

[28]"Here we must focus on predicates that are true of each alone in their economic roles. For example, the Son alone became incarnate, and he alone was baptized. The Father alone spoke words praising Jesus at Christ's baptism, and the Holy Spirit alone descended as a dove at that event…. Even if we deny predicates usually applied to members of the Trinity according to their internal relations, we can still distinguish each from the others." Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 498.

[29]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 251.

[30]"So we may say that the role of the Father in creation and redemption has been to plan and direct and send the Son and Holy Spirit. This is not surprising, for it shows that the Father and the Son relate to one another as a father and son relate to one another in a human family: the father directs and has authority over the son, and the son obeys and is responsive to the directions of the father. The Holy Spirit is obedient to the directives of both the Father and the Son…. The Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father, but they are subordinate in their roles. Moreover, these differences in role are not temporary but will last forever …" Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 245.

[31]The Alexandrian theologian Origen (c. 185-c. 254) is frequently identified as the first to affirm that the generation of the Son by the Father is *eternal.*

[32]Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 236 and 434.

[33]The relevant phrases from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) include the following: "And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father."

[34]English citations from Augustine's *In Johannis evangelium tractatus* will be taken from Saint Augustine,

Fathers of the Church, vol. 79, *Tractates on the Gospel of John, 11-27* (trans. John W. Rettig; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988). English citations of *De trinitate* will be taken from Edmund Hill's translation: Saint Augustine, *The Trinity* (trans. Edmund Hill; Brooklyn: New City, 1991).

[35]It is important to recognize that the creator/creature distinction provides the context for Augustine's analysis of John 5:26. "Life in himself" can only be understood on the "creator" side of this distinction.

[36]Many theologians (rightly) cite John 5:26 as a proof text for self-existence of God. See Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 242.

[37]Augustine points out that the phrase "in himself" is crucial. The text does not merely say that the Father and Son possess "life" but rather "life in himself." See Augustine, *Tract.* 22.9, 205. The fact that the Son possesses "life in himself" rules out the possibility that the Son possesses a mutable form of life (i.e., human "life"): "What does it mean, he might be life in himself? He would not need life from another source, but he would be the fullness of life by which others, believing, might live while they live." Augustine, *Tract.* 22.9, 207.

[38]Here we see how human birth bears a limited likeness to eternal generation. As Augustine explains elsewhere, "Thus it is clear that the Son has another from whom he is and whose Son he is, while the Father does not have a Son from whom he is, but only whose Father he is. Every son gets being what he is from his father, and is his father's son; while no father gets being what he is from his son, though he is his son's father." Augustine, *De trin.* II.2, 98.

[39]Augustine's interpretation of the phrase "has been given" as "has been begotten" in John 5:26 may strike some readers as a huge leap. It is important to remember that Christian theologians frequently employ terms not found in the biblical text (e.g., *Trinity, person, essence, nature,* etc.) in order to explain what the text affirms. For example, most theologians (including those who reject eternal generation) interpret "life" in v. 26 as referring to God's essence even though the term *essence* is not found in John 5:26.

[40]It is crucial to distinguish the "judgment" this text renders regarding the relationship of the Son to the Father from differing "conceptualities" used to express this judgment (i.e., the language of "grant" in the text vs. the language of "generation," in the case of Augustine). For more on this important distinction, see David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 152-64.

[41]Some ante-Nicene theologians like Tertullian understood the generation of the Son to be temporal (immediately prior to creation) rather than eternal. This is sometimes described as a "two-stage" logos model.

[42]"Before all times he was coeternal with the Father. For the Father never was without the Son; but the Father is eternal, therefore the Son [is] likewise coeternal." Augustine, *Tract.* 19.13, 153.

[43]It should be noted that the essence of the Son is not generated but *communicated* to him by the Father. See Footnote 2.

[44]To say that the Son is generated by the "will" of the Father is to assert that the Son is a "creature."

[45]Augustine also likens the generation of the Son to the generation of a word by the human mind. See Augustine, *Tract.* 20.9, 173.

[46]Patristic writers frequently employ "light radiating from light" as an analogy for the generation of the Son by the Father. The ubiquity of this metaphor is attested by its inclusion in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381).

[47]The Son's light is also equal in its "duration" to the Father's: "How does an eternal, someone says, beget an eternal? As temporal flame generates temporal light. For the generating flame is of the same duration as the light which it generates, nor does the generating flame precede in time the generated light; but the light begins the instant the flame begins." Augustine, *Tract.* 20.8, 171.

[48]Commenting on the generation of the Son with the context of divine simplicity, Ayres explains, "Augustine does not imagine that we can grasp the dynamics of such a divine generation at other than a very formal level—we have no created parallel that offers anything other than a distant likeness." Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 226.

[49]"Provided then that we know this rule [*regula*] for understanding the scriptures about God's Son and can thus distinguish the two resonances in them, one tuned to the form of God in which he is, and is equal to the Father, the other tuned to the form of a servant which he took and is less than the Father, we will not be upset by statements in the holy books that appear to be in flat contradiction with each other." Augustine, *De trin.* I.22, 82.

[50]John 5:26 includes both personal and essential predications. The essential predication is "life in himself" while the personal predications include the names "Father" and "Son" as well as the mode by which Father and Son possess "life in himself."

[51]Augustine has an additional hermeneutical rule that in every action the divine persons work conjointly. This rule will be discussed below.

[52]In contemporary theology this distinction is expressed in terms of the immanent Trinity (God's inner life) and the economic Trinity (God's actions in creation and redemption). For discussion of the relationship between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity in Augustine's theology, see Keith E. Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 65-92.

[53]D. A. Carson, "God is Love," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (1999): 139. See also Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 77-80.

[54]Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 325; Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, 121. Although he affirms eternal generation, Calvin insists that John 5:26 refers not to the eternal relation of the Father and Son but exclusively to the Son's role as mediator: "For there he is properly speaking not of those gifts which he had in the Father's presence from the beginning, but of those with which he was adorned in that very flesh wherein he appeared." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.17.9, 1369.

[55]See Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 212, 242, 258, 462. "Evidence of Christ's deity stems from the fact that NT writers predicated attributes of Christ that belong only to God" (ibid., 462). In this context, Feinberg claims that John 5:26 explicitly predicates self-existence to Christ: "and possessing life in and of himself, i.e., having the attribute of aseity (John 5:26)" (ibid., 462).

[56]Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 488-492.

[57]Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Living Father," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 24.

[58]Ibid., 25.

[59]"Precisely in holding together the affirmations that the Son has 'life in himself' with the affirmation that he has 'been given' such life by the Father, we find the uniquely Johannine characterization of the relationship of the Father and the Son. The Father does not give the Son some thing, power, or gift; the Father gives the Son life." Thompson, "The Living Father," 25. A similar theme can be seen in John 6:57. "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

[60]A causal link between verse 25 and verse 26 is established by the Greek preposition *gar* ("for") in v. 26.

[61]Discussion of these texts is scattered through Books I to IV of *De trinitate*.

[62]Although this exegetical principle does not originate with Augustine, his formal explication of it constitutes one of his distinctive contributions to the development of Latin pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology.

[63]Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 116.

[64]"The contrast between John the Baptist and the Word is not that one is an agent of God whereas the other is not. Both are agents of God…. The contrast between John the Baptist and the Word concerns, then, their *status* as agents. One is earthly, merely human. The other is divine (and *also* human: see 1:14)." Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 116.

[65]"If we take the reason for his saying this to be that in the creaturely form he took the Son is less than the Father, it will follow that the Father must first have walked upon the water, and with spittle and mud opened the eyes of another man born blind, and done all the other things done by the Son when he appeared to men in the flesh, to enable the Son to do

them too, who as he said could do nothing of himself except what he saw the Father doing. Surely nobody, even out of his wits, could have such an idea." Augustine, *De trin*. II.3, 99.

[66]Sometimes it is not clear which rule applies: "So then, as I started to say, there are some things so put in the sacred books that it is uncertain which rule they are to be referred to; should it be to the Son's being less than the father because of the creature he took or to his being shown to be from the Father in his very equality with him?" Augustine, *De trin*. II.4, 99.

[67]One may wonder where the "equality" is to be found in the ordering described above. Equality is found in the fact that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act inseparably. This reality will be discussed below.

[68]The word "frequently" is crucial. These general patterns are not absolute. Fourth century anti-Nicene theologians attempted to appeal Scriptural differences among prepositions in order to argue that the Son is ontologically inferior to the Father. Basil of Caesarea responded to this argument by pointing out that flexibility exists in the use of biblical prepositions. See St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980).

[69]The numerous "sending" passages examined above reflect this ordered equality.

[70]Although the terms "Father" and "Son" may for us include ideas of "source of being," "subordination," or "dependence," in their Semitic Scriptural context they only communicate "*sameness of nature*." Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, 112 (italics original).

[71]Augustine's opponents, whom he calls "Arians," were probably Latin Homoian theologians. See Michel R. Barnes, "Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine's *De trinitate* I," *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999): 43-52; and idem, "The Arians of Book V, and the Genre of '*de Trinitate*,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993): 185-95. Latin Homoian theologians (e.g., Palladius and Bishop Maximinus) emphasized the Father as "true God" over and against the Son (particularly because of the Father's unique status as *ingenerate*).

[72]In the context of the Aristotelian distinction between "substance" and "accident," Augustine's opponents argued that terms like "unbegotten" and "begotten" name the substance of God. Since "unbegotten" and "begotten" clearly differ, the substance of the Son must differ from the substance of the Father. Augustine responded by pointing out that while no "accidents" can be predicated of God, not all predications must refer to God's "substance." Some predications (i.e., "begotten" and "unbegotten") are "relational." It is in this context he argues that "begotten" means the same thing as "Son" (i.e., relationship).

[73]In other words, at the level of Trinitarian hermeneutic, Augustine's "form-of-a-servant" rule cannot be applied to the Holy Spirit.

[74]"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26, ESV).

[75]Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 3.

[76]Ibid., 197.

[77]Ibid., 230.

[78]Ibid., 319.

[79]Although Augustine is speaking about the knowledge of the Father and Son, the following statement offers a small window into this reality: "Therefore the Father and the Son know each other, the one by begetting, the other by being born." Augustine, *De trinitate*, XV.23, 415.

[80]Notice the central role that eternal generation plays in Augustine's explanation: "If however the reason why the Son is said to have been sent by the Father is simply that the one is the Father and the other the Son, then there is nothing at all to stop us believing that the Son is equal to the Father and consubstantial and co-eternal, and yet that the Son is sent by the Father. Not because one is greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other the Son; one is the begetter, the other begotten; the first is the one from whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is from the sender" Augustine, *De trin*. IV.27, 172.

[81]Augustine's distinction between "mission" and "generation/procession" roughly corresponds to the contemporary distinction between the economic Trinity (mission) and the immanent Trinity (generation/procession). See Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and*

Religious Pluralism, 73-79.

[82]As Ayres explains, "the Father's eternal establishing of the divine communion is the foundation of all the inseparable actions of the three, even those which happen externally in time." Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 244.

[83]For a discussion of the agency (working) of the divine persons in Augustine's theology, see Keith E. Johnson, "Trinitarian Agency and the Eternal Sub-ordination of the Son: An Augustinian Perspective," *Themelios* 36 (2011): 7-25.

[84]What does it mean to affirm that the divine persons act "inseparably"? First, it means that all three persons are involved in every act of creation, providence, and redemption. For example, while it was only the Son who became incarnate, the incarnation of the Son was the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Second, it means that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit possess one will and execute one power. Inseparable operation is a direct implication and economic expression of intra-Trinitarian unity (i.e., monotheism). Moreover, inseparable operation is a fundamental axiom of pro-Nicene theology: "Although this doctrine is fundamental to late fourth-century, orthodox, Latin theology, it is important that we do not think of 'inseparable operation' as a peculiarly Latin phenomena. The inseparable operation of the three irreducible persons is a fundamental axiom of those theologies which provide the context for the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 and for the reinterpretation of Nicaea, which came to be the foundation of orthodox or catholic theology at the end of the fourth century. It is a principle found in all the major orthodox Greek theologians of the later fourth and fifth centuries, and enters later Orthodox tradition through such figures as John of Damascus in the eighth century." Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology,"56.

[85]See Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 254.

[86]Although Augustine is sometimes presented as a "philosopher" whose "Neoplatonic" convictions function like a cookie-cutter on the dough of Scripture, he is clear that Holy Scripture constitutes the authoritative basis for human knowledge of the triune God. What-ever else may have been involved, one thing is clear: the fifth-century debate over the doctrine of God was a battle about how rightly to read and interpret Scripture. In the latter context, Augustine contends "for the rightness of saying, believing, understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance or essence." Augustine, *De trin*. I.4, 67. Hence, his first priority is to "establish by the authority of the holy scriptures whether the faith is in fact like that." Augustine, *De trin*. I.4, 67. In an effort to demonstrate the unity and equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Augustine discusses numerous biblical texts. The scriptural index to *De trinitate* in volume 50a of *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* contains over 6800 biblical citations and allusions. See *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, vol. 50A (Turnholt: Brepols, 1968), 601-721. In addition to twenty-seven canonical Old Testament books, citations can be found from every New Testament book except Philemon.

[87]Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 51. See also Scott R. Swain, "The Trinity in the Reformers" in *Oxford Handbook on the Trinity* (ed. Matthew Levering and Gilles Emery; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227-39.

[88]Heiko Oberman distinguishes two understandings of the relationship of Scripture and tradition that provide a backdrop for later Reformation debates. According to "Tradition I," Scripture and tradition coincide in such a way that tradition simply represents Scripture properly interpreted. According to "Tradition II," Scripture and tradition represent parallel sources of revelation. The "II" in Tradition II stands for two sources whereas "Tradition I" represents a single-source view. The Council of Trent represents Tradition II while the Reformers reflect Tradition I. Thus, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, "We are here not confronted with the alternatives of Scripture and tradition but with the clash of two radically different concepts of tradition: Tradition I and Tradition II." Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late*

Medieval and Early Reformation (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 283. See also Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2002), 51-66.

[89]"It is important not to confuse this view—call it 'solo' *scriptura*—with the Reformation practice of *sola scriptura*. The main problem with 'solo' *scriptura* is that each biblical interpreter sees what is right in his or her own eyes." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 154.

[90]Critics of eternal generation sometimes present this doctrine as if it is merely dependent on a handful of dubious proof texts. At stake in this debate, however, are broader patterns of scriptural judgment regarding the nature of the eternal relationship of the Son to the Father.

[91]For Augustine there is an important sense in which the equality of the three divine persons can ultimately be traced to the Father. As Ayres explains, the Father is the "cause and source of the Trinitarian communion." Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 264.

[92]Inseparable operation played a key role in Patristic arguments for the ontological equality of the divine persons.

[93]"It is important to note, again, that while the Son is constituted by the relationships in which the Father generates him eternally, he can only be so *because* he is also life in itself, the fullness of the Godhead and, hence, necessarily simple." Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 245 (italics original).

[94]Thus, evangelicals who claim that all forms of eternal generation are necessarily subordinationist wrongly assume that every form of "derivation" must be equated with "creation."

[95]For Augustine, Scripture is a revelation—albeit in an accommodated form—of God's immanent life (e.g., John 1:1; 5:26, 10:30; Phil 2:6).

[96]Augustine, of course, does not use the terms "economic" Trinity and "immanent" Trinity. His terms are "mission" (economic Trinity) and "generation/procession" (immanent Trinity). See Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 73-79.

[97]Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 133.

[98]Ibid., 151.

[99]This does not mean that *everything* the Son does (eating, sleeping, fatigue, etc.) reveals his eternal relation to the Father. We must bear in mind the threefold manner in which the Scriptures speak about the Son: (1) in the "form of the servant," (2) in the "form of God," (3) in the mode of being "from the Father." Scriptural statements about the Son "in the form of a servant" should not be read back into God's inner life.

[100]Josh Malone suggested this helpful point.

[101]Some evangelicals attempt to ground distinctions among the divine persons in eternal "roles of authority and submission." This is not Augustine's position.

[102]Much evangelical Trinitarianism can be reduced to three points: (1) there is one God; (2) God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and (3) each of the divine persons is God. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 231. Many evangelicals assert these points without explaining how Scripture holds together these three realities (i.e., eternal relations).

[103]Medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas will later explain that the personal property of the Father is "paternity" while the personal property of the Son is "filiation."

[104]The key word is "exclusively." There are several problems with grounding the distinction of persons exclusively in the economy of salvation. First, external acts of the Trinity are the work of all three persons. For example, one cannot say that what makes the Father distinct from the Son is that the Father was creator. Creation was inseparably the work of the three. Second, if one grounds the distinction of persons exclusively in the economy of salvation, how does one rule out modalism (or, for that matter, tritheism)? In other words, how does one know that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not merely "faces" of an undifferentiated God? Finally, it is only by affirming a distinction of persons in the inner life of the Trinity that we are rightly able to distinguish the divine persons in the economy of salvation.

[105]The second commandment to make no graven images (Exod 20:4) aims at protecting the incomprehensibility of God.