

Outline of a Procline-Schuonian Trinitarian
Theology

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First Edition (June, 2021)

First published on theosymmetry.wordpress.com

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Introduction

This centre of this essay is the Trinitarian theology of the controversial “traditionalist” philosopher, Frithjof Schuon. I am of the opinion that Schuon’s philosophy is widely misunderstood and too easily dismissed, and this represents one of my contributions towards correcting the misconceptions about his thought. This essay is part re-interpretation, as I am using the work of other scholars, notably other Platonists, in order to show the deep coherence of a particularly controversial part of Schuon’s thought, that is, his trinitarian theology, which on first glance, may appear to be heretical. But this essay is also a personal theology, based on Schuon’s thoughts. It is my understanding of the issues involved. I don’t believe philosophy is disinterested in a negative sense. I believe it is as its name means, “love of wisdom”, and if, as the proverb says, “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”, “love of God” should be its end. Everything here is offered up to the fire in advance, that He may purify it in that ineffable unity of love and fear.

The aim of the essay is to unite Schuon’s trinity¹ with proclean theology as explained by Edward Butler² and Jonathan Greig³, using Bonaventurian trinitarian theology, as explained by Jordan Daniel Wood⁴. Schuon’s work forms the “scaffolding” with the rest acting as filler and an interpretive lens for Schuon’s “intuitive and anamnestic” theology⁵. I aim to explain:

1. The “beyond unicity” of the Absolute.
2. The necessary hierarchical and yet “consubstantial” kenosis of this absolute

¹ Frithjof Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*; Frithjof Schuon and James S. Cutsinger, *The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity, World Wisdom*, 2017 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1rfss2f.13>>; Patrick Laude, *Keys to the Beyond: Frithjof Schuon’s Cross-Traditional Language of Transcendence (SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions)* (SUNY Press, 2020).

² Edward Butler, *Essays on the Metaphysics of Polytheism in Proclus* (lulu.com, 2014).

³ Jonathan Greig, ‘Proclus on the Two Causal Models for the One’s Production of Being: Reconciling the Relation of the Henads and the Limit/Unlimited’, *International Journal of Platonic Tradition*, 14.1 (2020), 23–48 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/18725473-12341453>>.

⁴ Jordan Daniel Wood, ‘The Father’s Kenosis: A Defense of Bonaventure on Intra-Trinitarian Acts’, *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology*, 30.1 (2021), 3–31 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1063851220953363>>.

⁵ Laude.

To demonstrate the usefulness and truthfulness of this theology, these demonstrations will be applied to two questions, one of which is a puzzling feature of early Christian theology: The naming of the Son as the “Holy Spirit”⁶.

I

“Being” and “Beyond Being”

A key feature of Schuon’s theology is the distinction between “Being” and “Beyond Being”⁷. His use of this “distinction” seems to correspond to that between “Saguna Brahman” (Being) and “Nirguna Brahman” (Beyond Being), and at other times between the Eckhartian “God” (Being) and Godhead (Beyond Being). He would even argue that they are equivalent⁸. Here, he is in agreement with Rene Guenon’s metaphysics⁹. But, rather than simply quote Guenon and Schuon and move on, I want to approach this from another direction. I want to address this distinction in a way that clarifies that it is not a distinction as is found on the “chain of being”, such as that between platonic forms and their lower emanations, as some may think. It is not that Schuon is guilty of what D. B. Hart, echoing Heidegger, calls “onto-theology”¹⁰, where God is nothing but the top of a hierarchy, the first being, a being among beings, and nothing more. Yes, God is the “first being”, and this is one explanation of the distinction, but God is much more than that, and it is this “much more” that guarantees the truth of the “first being”. Considering that this distinction is at the heart of Schuon’s trinitarian and incarnational theology, this line of thought would be an important start in articulating the vision granted Schuon.

Motion

We begin at the beginning, the so called “proofs of God”, which Schuon says is *not a matter of drawing “conclusions” from given “proofs,” but on the contrary, of “perceiving” the transcendent Real through its “signs” or “traces”; it is to see the Cause in the effects, the Principle in its manifestations, the Archetypes or the Ideas in their projections, the Necessary*

⁶ ‘CHURCH FATHERS: Dialogue with Trypho, Chapters 55-68 (Justin Martyr)’ <<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/01285.htm>> [accessed 28 March 2021]; ‘How Jesus Became God’s Holy Spirit – Scribes of the Kingdom’ <<https://scribesofthekingdom.com/2020/04/15/how-jesus-became-gods-holy-spirit/>> [accessed 26 April 2021].

⁷ Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*; Frithjof Schuon, *To Have a Center*, 2015; Frithjof Schuon and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Essential Frithjof Schuon, The Library of Perennial Philosophy*, 2005 <<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0513/2005014071.html>>.

⁸ Frithjof Schuon, ‘The Question of Theodicies’, *World Wisdom Online Library*.

⁹ Rene Guenon, *The Multiple States of the Being* (Sophia Perennis, 2004).

¹⁰ David Bentley Hart, *The Hidden and the Manifest Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017).

*in the possible*¹¹. Considering the subject matter, the point of these arguments are not to prove the existence of an entity, much the opposite. It is to awaken the person to the root of reality, and show its utter immanent transcendence. It is to lead the person beyond the dialectic of entities and into death, so that we might be reborn. In realizing the purpose of these “arguments”, which are really prayers, we find our “centre”, where *everything ceases to be what it is*; but precisely through which *it begins to be*¹². Taking the argument from motion as our starting point, we want to see how to move from beings to Being, or rather to stop moving entirely, beginning with the question of motion.

“Things move”, fair enough, except you want to deny that premise, to which I’d say “go ahead”. What is the principle of movement? The Aristotelian answer would be “the principles of potentiality and actuality”. I think this is the correct answer, but then we have to explain why, for “those in the back”.

Speaking of “local motion”, that is, change in spatial position – a phenomenon necessarily ties to temporality (another topic entirely) – let’s take an object moving in a straight line. Of course we have equations for this and all, but the principles we are talking about here precede these equations, in that without them the equations make no sense. Speaking in terms of possibility, an object moving from position A to position B if it is *possible* for it to do so. By “possible”, I mean, barring extenuating circumstances like barriers and such. Now, we could then attempt to define “possibility”, but that is going down another rabbit hole. Schuon and Guenon have entire essays on that topic¹³. Now, the fullness of *what is possible* for an object given the nature of that object (its “essence”, *what it is* that makes it “this and not that”) is the object’s *potentiality*. Hence, motion is only possible if the object has the *potential* to move to that particular position.

We have that into which something changes (potential), and that which changes (the actual object). Actuality speaks of that which is present *now*. It speaks of the present, and that which is *directly* present to know. *Potential* is only *indirectly* known *through* the *actual* object. You know the ball has the potential to move because the ball is there. If the ball is not there, there’s no potential to know about, except you find something actual which can entail the future actuality (and hence present potentiality) of that ball (for example, the presence of a footballer).

¹¹ Frithjof Schuon, Gillian Harris, and Angela Schwartz, ‘Primordial Meditation’.

¹² Schuon, Harris, and Schwartz.

¹³ Frithjof Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human: A New Translation with Selected Letters (Writings of Frithjof Schuon)* (World Wisdom, 2013); Guenon, *The Multiple States of the Being*.

Hence, the argument has the premise that only the actual can *actualise* a potential. Only that which is present can bring something to the present. So the argument continues.

Considering the “progress” of mover and moved, can this chain of causality continue on forever? In terms of local motion, perhaps; but the argument is speaking in terms of the *principle of movement*, and not just in terms of local motion. Hence, we have to consider all forms, and especially “higher” forms of motion. If you haven’t noticed it yet, motion here takes on the broader meaning it used to have, which is simply *change*. Local motion is *change* in spatial position. Temporality is also a form of change, and the act of thinking is a form of motion that is not spatial, at least not in “locally” spatial (if you consider the conceptual a type of “space”), yet is temporal.

On all these “forms” of motion, there is one constant, and this is the “dialectic” of actuality and potentiality. Actuality is the “centre” around which potential must turn. There must be the actual in order that potential must indirectly manifest. A moving object requires an actual object. Thinking requires an actual thinker, and so on. But, the fact that we can know potentiality at all, even *now*, means there is some deeper identity between it and the actual. If the actual is characterized by a *direct presence*, and the potential by an *indirect presence*, then the link between the two must be *presence*, in which the actual must mediate the potential, and which must always be tied to the *present*, that “part” of time that is valueless and yet of countless value, for it is fleeting and yet the background of all awareness. This “presence” in the “present” is characterized by “intelligibility”, the possibility of knowledge as such. The strangeness and infinitude of this knowledge should be explained with an example.

Consider a rabbit. Once you see that rabbit, even if you don’t know the name, the species, genera, etc, *you know it is something*. You know it is “this” and not “that”. This innate knowledge is a result of the rabbit’s intelligibility, the reality of its “essence”, which is a principle that distinguishes objects as “this” and not “that” on several levels, whether genus, species, etc. Having detailed knowledge of this rabbit only reinforces this, as essence is both continuous and discontinuous. Essence is a fundamental that characterizes all our thinking and knowing about objects and their categorization. It is a category of categories, a primary category (the list varies). Here, and precisely in this sense, “Essence” is a *cause*. It is an *explanation* for something¹⁴; and not just any explanation, a fundamental explanation, a

¹⁴ E. N. Beard, ‘Platonic Causality : A Primer of Metaphysical Intuitions’, 2020, 1–35
<<http://nuclearaesthetics.blogspot.com/2020/09/platonic-causality-primer-1st-ed.html?m=1>>.

“rational relation”¹⁵. It explains *what* a thing is. It explains its *being* as it is. The rabbit has “rabbitness” as a cause, as well as “mammalness”, “animalness”, etc, as a chain of “higher” causes reaching up to “the first”. Some may balk at the seeming triviality of this observation, but its triviality is its most important function. Without the ubiquity and necessity of this principle, all our thoughts collapse into absurdity. Essence is real, it must be. Otherwise, all our words are unresolvable contradictions. I would implore you to follow that logic to its conclusion.

Remember, it is this essence that determines what is possible for the rabbit, and hence the potentialities for it. In short, essence is the very actuality of the actual object. It is an object itself, but an object of objects, determining others and containing in itself all that is possible for them. It is the “presence” of both the direct actual objects it determines and the indirect presence of their potentialities. In a “spatial” scheme, we could say potentiality is higher than actuality of a sensible object in its presence in the higher and more “complete” essence of that sensible object. Hence, we could say potentiality is actuality *yet to be received* by the sensible and the changing.

If you look here, we have found the logic of the argument we started with. That which moves – whether locally or not, endlessly from the past to future or from an absolute “big bang” or whatever temporal beginning you seek – must have this *actual* “centre” of motion. This “centre” must neither be spatial nor temporal, it must not “move” with respect to the moved, etc. Why? If we continue with our example, where we saw the logic of “essence”, we see that essence has *actual* in itself, *as itself*, all potentialities for whatever is possible for an object that instantiates it limitedly. Hence, having no potentiality, it does not change. It cannot change if it is to be essence, it is itself that which “gives itself” limitedly to objects that change. It is also not an “higher image” of whatever it manifests. You see a rabbit, not rabbitness, but rabbits manifest rabbitness, by being rabbits. It is important to note that. In platonic philosophy, of which Aristotelianism is a part, the essence is fully actual in a “form”, which is the “principle of sameness”¹⁶ for an object. One might call the form the fullness of the essence as such. Hence, contra many misconceptions, a form *is not just* an abstract object, even if abstracted, or an

¹⁵ David Bentley Hart, *Theological Territories: A David Bentley Hart Digest* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2020). “A better rendering of *aitia* or *causae*, in the ancient or mediaeval sense, might be “explanations,” “rationales,” “logical descriptions,” or (still better) “rational relations.”

¹⁶ W Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*, 1st Editio (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). “...that principle within each member of the species that makes it to be this kind of being and not some other kind. It is the intelligible, qualitative pattern or constitutive structure within the being that makes it to be this kind of being. Aristotle first called it the essential form of the being”

image in conceptual space. The ideal is strictly unimaginable, and many an antique Platonist will say you cannot imagine the forms nor is theosis into their number a form of imagination, as important as it may be beforehand.

Now this question arises. Before we go into the very end of the argument, from many to one:
How can one give to that which changes without changing?

Here, we have to go back to the logic of essence. Essence, as the principle of being and intelligibility of a being as “this” and not “that”, is also a principle of “abundance”, at least, up to a certain point. It is that which contains in itself all that is possible of a being of a kind *in principle*. Because of its nature as a principle, strictly beyond imagination and yet undergirding it, it has all this possibility indistinctly, *as itself*. The principle of a varied phenomenon is itself that phenomenon, *in essence*. We can deduce the varied manifestations, but the principle itself remains intact and unchanged. We have here a way of viewing what Neo-Platonists call “emanation”¹⁷. The principle is, in itself, unchanging, but it is not a principle if it is not a principle *of something*. The principle must give what it is a principle of, and it must do this without ceasing to be *this principle* in any way, whether through spatial, temporal, or conceptual change. Principles are beyond change, and yet undergird it. Because they contain in themselves all that changes *at once* and indistinctly, they are not objects like those in time, not even seemingly “unchanging” objects. In truth, there is no such object in space and time. All objects in space and time, or in time alone, like in the mind, must change. It also means these principles are not confined to mind, at least not mind defined as that which thinks in time, even “perpetual time”, where there are objects that “remain the same” through the endless eons. Such is not the eternity expressed here, for again, time is itself a form of change. It can even be “spatialized”. Essence is supposed to have all of that indistinctly beyond even that, for it is what makes things in endless time intelligible at all. It is because of this “beyond time” characteristic that true eternity is often called an “eternal present”, because it is a “present” that has no past and no future, not because it has limited itself, but precisely because it is unlimited; all change is in itself, in an infinitely swift “movement” indistinguishable from staticity. There, movement and staticity meet.

It is this “eternity” that then requires essence to “give”, for it is the very possibility and principle of many other possibilities of a particular kind in one “swift”, “present” movement. Forms, the fullness of essence, are themselves “givings”, “verbs”, “*to be* this”. There is a lot more we

¹⁷ Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus (The Arguments of the Philosophers)*, 1999.

could say about this, but I think Norris Clarke and a few others give more explanations than I can give here¹⁸.

The end of the argument from motion is the end of essence. Following our logic from particular to general, we move from “to be this and not that” to “to be”, from beings to Being. From Essences to Essence, from sub-principles to the overarching principle. What is now “the principle of principles”? This is the “unmoved mover”, “unactualized actualizer”, who we will indirectly address in the next sub-section. This may have seemed like a long detour through natural theology, but it is the absolutely important first step in Schuon’s Trinitarian theology, for what many call “natural theology” is for him a part and parcel of the highest metaphysics. It is a mystical ascent, the seed of revelation that must then bloom “beyond being”. For Schuon, “natural theology” is the only theology, because it is never merely “natural” in contradistinction to the supernatural. It is the fullness of true theology most of which we have already lost and require various divine interventions, “revelations” to remember. Every “unique” revelation is in the “natural” waiting to be found, because for Schuon, the “natural” is beyond the limitations of created nature. In short, and following everyone from Schuon to D. B. Hart “Nature” is never merely “Natural”¹⁹. Its mere existence is “supernatural”, and here we will find the Trinity through the very lens of nature, for God became nature that nature might become God.

The First Being

Implicit in the argument we just passed through is a practice of “ascent” and “descent”. We didn’t look at a “flat plain” where otherwise similar types of objects were compared. We were “viewing” and “climbing” *through* manifestations to their principles, and *through* the principles themselves in their capacities as manifestations of higher principles. We know the higher *in terms of* the lower (Ordo Cognoscendi) while understanding that the ontology and

¹⁸ Clarke; Beard; Algis Uzdavinys and Jay Bregman, *The Heart of Plotinus: The Essential Enneads (The Perennial Philosophy)*, ed. by Algis Uzdavinys (World Wisdom, 2009).

¹⁹ David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 2013 <<https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.51-3784>>. “Physical reality cannot account for its own existence for the simple reason that nature—the physical—is that which by definition already exists; existence, even taken as a simple brute fact to which no metaphysical theory is attached, lies logically beyond the system of causes that nature comprises; it is, quite literally, “hyperphysical,” or, shifting into Latin, *super naturam*. This means not only that at some point nature requires or admits of a supernatural explanation (which it does), but also that at no point is anything purely, self-sufficiently natural in the first place.

causation is in the opposite “direction” (*Ordo Essendi*)²⁰. This is the very mark of Platonism²¹. This is important to note because, I will argue, following Schuon and his student James Cutsinger²², that something like this occurs in the Trinity, with a few caveats and specifications. The Trinity is “vertical”, as well as “horizontal”, even transcending both categories²³. I will also argue that the subject of at least some of the “classical” attributes of God, such as “omnipotence”, “omnipresence”, etc, is most properly “the first being”, through which we can then make an indirect claim of the One that “neither is, nor is one”²⁴.

The “first being” is the “first mixture” of Proclus, the last of the Triad of “Limit” (*Peiron*), “Unlimited” (*Apeiron*) and “Mixture” (*Mikton*). The first two are principles of being, the last is their manifestation as one unit, the first of which is “Being” itself, or “the first being”²⁵, which for our purposes here can also be called “essence”. But, to continue with our line of thought from the beginning, the “vertical” ascent, we want to get to this logic “from below”, as Proclus surely did, for there is no other way to gain such knowledge.

In ascending through our argument from motion, we reach the limit, the first. Note the terminology. From beings that instantiate essences we move to essences and then up through them to essence itself, their unity as one principle. As this is the principle of intelligibility, there is literally “no thing” beyond it, for a “thing” has essence as “this” and not “that”. “Essence” as such is “thingness”. As the overarching principle, all essences are its essence, from dogs to stars to thoughts and men. It is the “first being”, not in that there is another of such a being, but in the other meaning of “first”: It is principal, a “principle” that manifests through and in others, while remaining itself in eternity. As the essence of essences, it, in relation to all things, is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. It is the limit of being, and hence all beings are under it. It is the Intellect of intellects, the stone of stones, the star of stars, space of space, the

²⁰ Hart, *Theological Territories: A David Bentley Hart Digest*. “in Scholastic terms, what is for us the first moment within the *ordo cognoscendi*, the order of understanding, is really the final moment within the *ordo essendi*, the order of being. We know everything first as an effect before we can know its causes.

²¹ Lloyd P. Gerson, ‘What Is Platonism?’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 43.3 (2015), 253–76 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2005.0136>>.

²² James S. Cutsinger, ‘Disagreeing to Agree: A Christian Response to “A Common Word”’, *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of ‘A Common Word’*, 2.March (2010), 111–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230114401>>.

“As we Orthodox see it, prayerful fidelity to the witness of Scripture, the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, and the language of liturgical worship requires that the word “God” be reserved, strictly speaking, not for some generic form of “self-sufficient life” but for God the Father alone, the first Person of the Holy Trinity, who is said to be the Fount (*pēgē*) of all divinity and the uncaused Cause (*aitia*) of the other two Persons, the Son and the Spirit.”

²³ Jordan Daniel Wood, ‘The Father’s Kenosis: A Defense of Bonaventure on Intra-Trinitarian Acts’, *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology*, 30.1 (2021), 3–31 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1063851220953363>>.

²⁴ Butler. He paraphrases Plato in *Parmenides*

²⁵ Edward P Butler, *The Gods and Being in Proclus*, 2008, XXVI.

principle beyond which nothing directly positive can be known. I say “positive” because although we arrive to this point by a kind of “negation” whereby we lose sight of beings, *through* beings, to get to their ultimate intelligible principle, this principle is most properly spoken of *positively*. It is spoken of this way because it is the *direct* principle of the positive “thingness” of all beings. In speaking about Being as such or the first being, we are speaking analogically. Analogy is a middle way between Equivocity (a word meaning different things with respect to different referents) and Univocity (a word meaning the same thing with respect to different referents). The form of a rabbit is more “rabbit” than individual rabbits, hence we can say that the rabbit is both like (in that it participates the form) and unlike (it participates it limitedly) the form. Rabbitness means the same thing in the rabbit and the form (Univocity), and yet does not mean the same thing, since the rabbit is only participating limitedly in rabbitness (Equivocity). This is Analogy. However, all of these are still *properly* applied to their referent. They really apply to that which we refer to. The same claim repeats: the proper referent for the various “omni” attributes of God is the first being. But then, from here, how do we speak of the One as such? Perhaps we don’t. Analogy in this schema doesn’t move past the first being. In fact, we speak most properly of the One by speaking *through* the first being, at least that’s the way it looks to me. The identity of person is what assures this “proper speech”, but not according to the nature of being as such. This means, we don’t speak of the One “as such” at all, since, in truth, there is no such thing. But, I’m getting ahead of myself. Let us come back to this from below.

One would wonder why we don’t stop here, at the first being. Is this not Anselm’s argument? Well, yes and no. Anselm’s argument is in itself an ascent from beings to Being²⁶, but it blurs the line between the first being and “beyond being”. This is fine, considering that, “hypostatically”, he is still correct, and he did not intend to write a treatise on the distinctions I am writing about here. Here, I want to make a different point, one that is still in line with Anselm’s argument. The point is the *personal* identity of “the first being” and that “Limit” which is “beyond being”. But, how do we do this? Have we not skipped a step on our journey and assumed a “beyond being”? What is “beyond being”? The point has already been elaborated on in the context of Maximian Christology²⁷, but we will begin answering these questions in this sub-section, beginning with the contingency of “the first being”.

²⁶ James S. Cutsinger, ‘Thinking the Unthinkable: Anselm’s Excitatio Mentis’, April 2001, 2007.

²⁷ Jordan Daniel Wood, ‘That Creation Is Incarnation in Maximus Confessor’ (Boston College, 2018) <<http://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:108259>> [accessed 25 May 2021].

Limit and Unlimited

The first being, as the fullness of essence, reveals its contingency in the question of existence as such. The question goes: *is the essence of something the explanation of its existence?* We could rephrase it as: *Does the existence of a thing follow from its essence alone?* The famous answer is *No*. The essence/existence distinction is central in Thomism, but it can also be found in Neoplatonism if searched for²⁸.

Another way to go about this is to ask if there are still deeper *explanations* for the first being. Since, as we saw before, that a “cause” is an “explanation” for something – a “rational relation”, in D. B. Hart’s words – then we are also asking if the first being has a cause or causes. These causes will necessarily be “beyond” essence, since they explain essence. Are there causes like this? Not intelligible but “super intelligible”? The answer seems to be *Yes*. Why? Because the first being can be explained in two opposed yet complimentary ways:

1. As something distinct, as *one thing* apart from its effects, since it is *one principle*.
2. As something *continuous* with its effects, since it is one and the same principle of essence in all things.

These two explanations are really *modes* of unity, even if the second leads to multiplicity. That there is *one rabbitness* guarantees the possibility of many sensible rabbits on earth in principle, even if there are no rabbits on earth at a point in time.

So, there are two explanations for the first being and for being as such:

1. That which limits, which guarantees unity in the mode of discontinuity.
2. That which “unlimits”, that which guarantees unity in the mode of continuity.

Hence, we return to our earlier triad, from the bottom up this time, and see the reversed and true order of causation (top-bottom). Since these two principles are distinguishable in the first being, the first being is not a “unity” of the two principles – even if it is a unity of essence – it is a *mixture* of the two principles. While the varied essences are indistinguishable in the first being, making it a unity of essence – and this is what unity means, to be indistinguishable as *one thing* despite (and also because) whatever is brought together to be united – the two modes of unity in the first being are distinguishable and hence not a unity in it. A mixture is not a principle along with that which is mixed, hence the mixed is not a principle “beyond essence” as the first two, but it is the principle *of essence* as it governs the reality of essences.

²⁸ Gerson, *Plotinus (The Arguments of the Philosophers)*. He uses the distinction to explain the absolute simplicity of the One and the “minimal complexity” of Intellect.

Since the first being has further explanation “beyond itself”, an explanation which is not of essence, but of unity, it is safe to say that the first being, qua essence, is still contingent, and that its essence is distinct from its existence. But is this existence synonymous with the duality of limit and unlimited and nothing more? It seems not, because they are both modes *of unity* or *oneness*, and it is unity which seems to be the highest term here, but how? Is unity synonymous with existence? Perhaps, but we will have to re-understand unity as an “apophatic” term. But first, to connect this to my topic, I should say here that everything said so far is in line with Schuon’s own understanding of the causes of being, although he, like many antique Platonists, start “from the top”:

*Absolute Substance extends Itself, through relativization, under the aspects of **Radiance** and **Reverberation**; that is to say, It is accompanied—at a lesser degree of reality—by two forms of emanation, one that is dynamic, continuous, and radiating, and the other static, discontinuous, and formative²⁹.*

As we can see, “Radiance” corresponds to “Unlimited” and “Reverberation” to “Limit”. In the same passage he also connects them directly to the “Son” (reverberation) and “Spirit” (radiance) of Trinitarian theology, a connection we are going to explore here as the very basis of his “Vertical Trinity”. But first, we take another seeming detour.

Person as Unity

We originally took a journey from beings to Being, and we were in the process of moving “beyond being”, as contradictory as that seems. But, looked at differently, this is also a journey to unity, from many to one: from many rabbits – species or individuals – to one rabbitness, from many animals to one animalness, up onto one “isness”, the first being.

As we also saw, this “isness” is not its own explanation of unity, it has further explanations. But this explanation cannot also be an “isness”, as it lies “beyond”. It is a strange seeming contradiction to talk of what is beyond “is”, beyond “being”, and this is where the language of personal identity takes over from (and completes) analogy. We can only speak of “beyond being” in terms of being. We are not referring to anything as such, not directly, except first being, yet we can only speak of it in terms of the first being, and this is because *it is* the first

²⁹ Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*.

being, yet (in Christian language) *not because of the nature* of the first being. This is necessary, but we will find out in what I think is a remarkable way. Let us take the detour from the detour and explore the “inward”.

“Who am I?” is the operative question here. “Who?” is actually a puzzling question. We are no longer speaking in terms of “whatness” but “whoness”, “person”. But, what is “whoness”? This is a contradictory question, in truth, and a wrong one at that. We might ask “What is whatness?” because of the reversion of being, but “who” is not a “what” and “what” cannot explain “who”. Considering the fact that the other questions of “How?”, “Why?” “When?” are only explicable in terms of the previous two, we have to say that only “who” can explain “whoness”. The correct question is “Who is Whoness?”

Starting with “Who am I?”, the answer definitely cannot be in terms of “what”, because as previously mentioned, “Who?” and “What?” are different questions, the former not reducible to the latter. “What?” ends with the first being, “Who?” by implication, must go much further. If person is not reducible to essence, then what is their relationship, if any?

We can begin to answer this by equating person and identity. A person is an identity. By implication, an identity is a unity, for a unity is identical with itself, and an identity is itself unified. The whole question of the stability of identity through time is a question of unity. What is that which stays the same? The first answer is essential form, the second is person.

This question is exactly what Cutsinger asks when he gives his explanation of how we can understand the unity of the natural sciences and the “spiritual science” we call religion. Their unity is in the person who practices both³⁰. In asking this question, we begin to eliminate candidates. I am not my body, I am not my soul. Both change. I am not my eternal “spirit” – by which I mean eternal Intellect coextensive with the intelligible essential form of humanity – because it (and all the previously mentioned) are “whats”, even if they are important “whats”. They are not “Whos”. The journey leads us beyond being itself, into unity, for “I” is beyond even the unity of essence. It is, in the end, Unity itself. The “ground of being” is, in the end, personhood. Personhood is unity. Personhood is that which enables being. In the search for personhood, we end up with the Vedic axiom: “That art Thou”³¹. Personhood is uncaused. Even

³⁰ James S Cutsinger, *Requiring Religion: Be What Knows*, 2008

<<http://www.cutsinger.net/wordpress2/?p=104>> [accessed 25 May 2021]. “The key to this reappraisal is an axiom— anticipated by my subtitle—that might be expressed as follows: To know what is, one must be what knows... Having learned in high school, in their study of the philosophy of science, that the seeming facts of the empirical world are the product of many prior selections and interpretations, it is essential that our students now be given in college the opportunity to begin asking themselves the question, Who or what is selecting? Who or what is interpreting?”

³¹ Ananda K Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity* (Select Books, 1989).

more intriguingly, personhood, not being bound by essence, is indistinguishable from its existence. Personhood is Unity beyond being, without the duality of essence and existence. Personhood is self-explained, “causeless”. Here, we find Schuon’s love for Vedic philosophy vindicated, because, contra the various caricatures, his philosophy is not “impersonal” in the simply privative sense. It is “supra-personal”, it locates person beyond the finite. He calls it “Self”³², and here again we see the apophatic meaning of this “unity” in the apophasis undergirding the reality of “person”. Person is not “one thing”. It is neither singular nor an essence to be labelled “thing”. It is not “plural” either, since they imply each other (being “one thing” implies there is another). Unity is not a united thing. Unity is simply beyond the dialectic of singular and plural. It is “Non-dual”, the translation of “Advaita”. Person is only known *through* essence just as unity is only known through essence as a united being. Person acts *as* this or that³³. This apophasis is in truth the ultimate Cataphasis. In denying it any particular essence, we indirectly attribute to it all essences³⁴, and by implication realize it is in itself a gift whose gifts are those incalculable essences³⁵ that begins with the first being.

Person and Personhood, Being and Beyond Being

The reality of “non-duality” that is personhood answers the question “Who is Whoness?” It does this by reversing the question and giving it as an answer.

Q: “Who is Whoness?”

A: “Whoness is Who”

Because of the nature of personhood, something like exemplification occurs “beyond being”, but with an important exception. Since personhood is not an essence – it is “beyond being” –

³² Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*; Schuon and Nasr.

³³ Wood, ‘That Creation Is Incarnation in Maximus Confessor’. “And so Maximus ceaselessly proclaims revelation of Christ’s person comes through his parts: “he revealed himself in the unicity of his person...by the personal identity of his own parts.”

³⁴ Guenon, *The Multiple States of the Being*. “limitation presents the character of a veritable negation; to set a limit is to deny to that which is limited everything that this limit excludes, and consequently the negation of a limit is properly the negation of a negation, that is to say, logically, and even mathematically, an affirmation, so that in reality the negation of all limit is equivalent to total and absolute affirmation. That which has no limits is that of which nothing can be denied, and is therefore what contains everything, that outside of which there is nothing”

³⁵ Wood, ‘The Father’s Kenosis: A Defense of Bonaventure on Intra-Trinitarian Acts’. “In Plotinus we first discover the direct correlation of the One’s nothingness to its primal fecundity in generating all things. Despoiled of content, its giving comes from no-thing and its nothingness grounds its giving: “It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being (οὐκ ὄν), but the generator of being.” Artisans give to what already is, forms give what they are, but the One gives because it receives not.”

the relationship of personhood and person is not that between essence, exemplified in form, and its various lesser instantiations. Personhood is also person, but persons are not directly personhood. This asymmetry lies in the “structure” of personhood. Personhood is, first of all, beyond being. But personhood is also absolutely “prior” as pure identity. There is nothing “beyond personhood” we might say, and this time we do not mean this in the same sense as the way we said of the first being. The first being, despite being omnipotent, omniscient, etc, is not the explanation of its own existence. Personhood on the other hand, is its own explanation. It requires no prior principle, it is its own. But, Personhood is not “essence” in the intelligible sense. It is not “Being” or “Intellect”, one being the phenomenological inverse of the other. It is rather the very “first person” to the precise degree of which it is personhood: infinite.

Personhood is *the* first person, the original “I”, the Atman, and this at once. Remember, “Whoness is Who”. While Being is only intellect “in reverse”, if you will, personhood is *directly* person. But how do we know this from persons? How did we arrive at this from below? Recall our talk about the unity of the first being. It is found in the “modes of unity” beyond being, Limit and Unlimited. Because Unity is Person, these are then two “modes of person”. Although I am using “modes” here, the word as I have used it corresponds to the Proclean use of “*idiotês*”, which Edward Butler translates as “peculiarity”³⁶, knowable only through their effects, as we have seen with Limit and Unlimited cause in their first mixture. Although this peculiarity is associated with the proclean henads³⁷ and not directly the intelligible triad of limit, unlimited, and mixture, it is possible to consider Limit and Unlimited as the first henads³⁸. I will not rehearse the arguments concerning the relationship between the henads and the intelligible triad, that is well worn territory³⁹, but I will use them to explain Schuonian trinitarian theology; beginning, as always, from the bottom.

Beginning again from the first being, from the fact of person as unity, it is then correct to say that the person of the first being *is not* found in being. It is in the principle of unity beyond it.

³⁶ Butler.

³⁷ Antonio Vargas, ‘An Introduction to Proclus’ Theoretical Philosophy’ <https://www.academia.edu/44084940/An_Introduction_to_Proclus_Theoretical_Philosophy> [accessed 13 June 2021]. The Henads are the gods themselves, whether Zeus or Hades or Athena. They are “simple identities, unattached to any substance, and are thus fully free and sovereign relative to the substances that they control. A self-subsistent Unity enjoys a unique identity and existence entirely independent of its substance, powers and activities.” (Pg. 29). This point about “identity” will be elaborated on later, but it is safe to say now that it means “persons” in a particular sense, one that is very “Vedantic”. They are “beyond being”, and like the One, they are absolutely simple for this reason. A possible analogue in Islamic Neoplatonism is discussed in a later footnote.

³⁸ Pieter D’Hoine and Martijn Marije, *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*, ed. by Pieter D’Hoine and Martijn Marije, 1st Editio (Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁹ Greig.

Again, this is indirectly positive. In the denial of essence to person, we acknowledge its gift of essence. “The negation of negation is an affirmation” is my Guenonian paraphrase here⁴⁰. As the “person” and unity of being in its distinction, “Limit” is the proper person of referent here. That this is not exactly a new idea is most clear in the way “Unlimited” is sometimes treated as the “power” of “Limit” in Proclus⁴¹. But I want to work out why this is the case. Recall that “Limit” and “Unlimited” are “characters” of unity, and hence person. “Limit” is “static, discontinuous, and formative” and “Unlimited” is “dynamic, continuous, and radiating”⁴². By its “peculiarity”, Unlimited cannot be the direct subject of the first being’s person. This is because the first being is in its nature *discontinuous* from its person as limit. There is *no direct natural continuous* connection between the first being and personal unity. Its essence is not its existence. Precisely *because* of its distinction from personhood *by nature* and its integral unity in this distinction, its proper referent for unity in personhood is Limit. In this sense, Limit precedes Unlimited. Unlimited then serves as the person *through* which this distinction is first generated, and then enforced. In short, since Limit is the very unity of person that spawns the first being, Unlimited has to be the power of unitive person maintaining that unity of person. It is the person of Unlimited that makes the first being and Limit *the same person*. Limit maintains the *disconnect* of the nature of the first being from the person, while it is the person of Unlimited that maintains the *continuous identity* of Limit and the first being. Limit, through Unlimited, *creates itself* as the first being. This is, as you can see, a celestial *incarnation*. Here, we see the intensely personal nature of the uncreated. Power is itself person, and it is another person who also “uses” it; not as a tool, but as itself. Because of the eternity of these processions, it is false to say there is a possible world where limit is not also the first being. Limit is only itself when it manifests itself as the first being, and Unlimited is not itself until it facilitates this self-affirmation and creation. All this comes from the movement “beyond being”, where we discover the two unities and trace our way back down. It is this identity in difference, so aptly explained in Christological terms by J. D. Wood⁴³ that, I suspect, causes these two unities to be collectively termed “Being” by Schuon. As the identity of the first being (Limit) and the “personal power” that maintains this identity (Unlimited), they are called “Being”, and so named by their effects, via negativa. Schuon tended to call the realm of the first being “celestial”, reserving “Being” for the personal realities undergirding and animating

⁴⁰ Guenon, *The Multiple States of the Being*.

⁴¹ D’Hoine and Marije; Greig; Butler.

⁴² Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*.

⁴³ Wood, ‘That Creation Is Incarnation in Maximus Confessor’. “That hypostatic determination stands indifferent to nature is precisely what makes it wholly hospitable to nature.”

them⁴⁴. He then reserved the name “Beyond Being” for the unnameable reality that is beyond even the identity of the first being and limit. This is the reality of “Atman”, the “first person”. We find Atman by considering the deeper identity of the two persons of Limit and Unlimited. What is their common principle? It is clear that they are not essences, they do not have “isness”, and so are not true multiplicities. They are inseparably united in personhood and are yet different persons. And here we have named their common principle, as before: Personhood. As “characters” of unity. It is unity, understood as “non-duality” that is their common principle. And again, as we have already established, because of the “beyond essential”, “non-nature” nature of personhood, it is in fact the “first person”. While not being *essentially* superior to the other “persons”, it necessarily “manifests” in *peculiar* difference, for there is no hierarchy of essence here in a way that implies inferiority of persons, no relationship between form and lesser image. What we have here is something different, yet “innascible”⁴⁵. The ultimate reality is named from “below to above”, from persons we get “personhood”, yet even personhood is person, and by being such is “consubstantial” with other persons, as fully personal as they are, so much so that the other two persons can also be named “personhood” by derivation. Now beyond the top, into the limitless sky, we can begin to descend again, and explain how this is the structure of Schuon’s Trinitarian theology, and finally its implications.

⁴⁴ Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*; Schuon and Nasr.

⁴⁵ Wood, ‘The Father’s Kenosis: A Defense of Bonaventure on Intra-Trinitarian Acts’.

II

Trinity of Persons, One Personhood

The innascibility of Personhood defines its “peculiarity”. Its “peculiarity” is, in fact, to have no peculiarity, in the mode of “innascibility”, “without origin”, “unbegotten” (in Christian language). Meaning, it is true when the non-Christian Platonist polytheists say it is not “personal”, if we add the caveat that this is infact, its “personality”. It is simply “The One”, the apophatic abyss that is the indirect fullness of affirmation. It truly has no name, but because of this it has all names, and the fitting name we give it here, for trinitarian purposes, is “Father”. We name it thus indirectly, as the henads and limit are themselves named “Father”⁴⁶ because of their generative effects. We can name the Personhood of persons, which is in itself a person, “Father”, for it “births” the persons, the Limit and Unlimited, for whom Henads are their separative identity according to effects named. As Wood fabulously explains:

If in the Father’s First act he gives all that he is to another, and if “the Father is Father because he generates,” then the Father is only himself by being nothing for himself and everything in and for and as another. The paternal act is essential kenosis. We might call this Bonaventure’s final trinitarian conversion of divine power. Since the Father is innascible, he is prime; since prime, principle; since principle, power; since power, totally diffused into another. Metaphysical primacy becomes kenotic: “If the Father also did not diffuse himself in the most final way, he would not be perfect.” So the inexorable issue of the coincidence of causalities in the Father is that whatever he has “through himself” – his primacy, his power, his very substance – is only fully contemplated in and as the profoundest depths of the Father’s kenotic act. Here we espy the true uniqueness of the Father’s First act.⁴⁷

Because this peculiarity of the One’s person is to have no peculiarity in innascibility, it therefore gives all peculiarity, and in so doing, Limit becomes “the one before being” in the perfect reception of this gift of personhood as the locus of henadic peculiarity, for all henads

⁴⁶ Butler. “The use of *prôtôs* in the above quote should thus be compared to the statement at *PT* III 21. 74. 7-8 that “just as the intelligible Gods are henads in the first place [*prôtôs*], so too are they fathers in the first place [*prôtôs*].” This passage refers to Proclus’ technical use of the term “father” to characterize *a mode of divine activity*”

⁴⁷ Wood, ‘The Father’s Kenosis: A Defense of Bonaventure on Intra-Trinitarian Acts’.

are limit⁴⁸. Here again, Unlimited is the person through which this occurs, by being the person through which the *continuous* identity of all henads *as limit* is maintained. In so doing, it effects the consubstantiality of “The One that neither is, nor is one” and the “One that is prior to being”⁴⁹. Limit and Unlimited are then two modes of unity whereby their peculiarity as no peculiarity is manifest from the One in their uniting the henads in perfect reception of personhood without dissolving them. The “perennialist” implications of this is beyond the scope of this essay, but is worth exploration in the future. And again, recall that it is precisely the very person of Limit, through Unlimited, that generates the nature of the first being, and by implication all other levels of being. This self-gift of person that generates being, is in actuality its very reality of self-gift back to the innascible person, for in the gift of beings up until the lowest level of the chain of being, Limit returns to The One. The seeming loss in the sensible is the return of the spirit to that which gave it. Downward is still, in a deeper sense, upward, and vice versa. In its very person as Limit, through the person of Unlimited, it generates difference, and in so doing affirms its self-identity, and in affirming its self-identity, unites, along with Unlimited, with the One, for the One is itself the gift of personhood as person. A coincidence of sameness and difference, as well as “verticality” and “horizontalty” is effected, in a manner affirming of divine simplicity. Hence, we can find why Schuon says:

*There is a primary duality, which is the Substance, and—principally within it but in fact outside its absolute Reality—there is Relativity or Mâyâ; now Mâyâ comprises the two aspects just mentioned, Radiance and Reverberation: the “Holy Spirit” and the “Son” are actualized in and through Mâyâ.*⁵⁰

This is so because:

The Absolute is infinite; therefore it radiates, and in radiating, it projects itself; the content of this projection being the Good. The Absolute could neither radiate nor produce thereby

⁴⁸ Butler. “Limit, Proclus explains, “is a God proceeding to the intelligible summit from the unparticipated and first God,”... Limit is not a particular God named, as it were, Peras, but a God as such, any God.” This is where I modify Butler’s view, as I conceive “Limit” here as the “locus” of particular Gods, of “archetypes”, and of “peculiarities” (*Idiotês*). Its peculiarity is that it is the locus of peculiarities in the mode of the principle of discontinuous unity, being none of them and hence all of them, just as unlimited is also this in the mode of the principle of continuous unity. This means that Limit and Unlimited are themselves “personhood” by derivation, as opposed to the “persons” of the henads, as I will explain further.

⁴⁹ Proclus and Thomas Taylor, *The Theology of Plato* (Prometheus Trust, 1995).

⁵⁰ Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*.

the image of the Good if it were not itself in its Immutability both the Good and the Radiation, or in other words, if it did not possess these intrinsic dimensions- and indistinctly since Relativity is transcended. This is the very foundation of what Christian doctrine terms the Hypostases. To say projection is to say polarization: the Infinite- at the degree of Maya or, more precisely, at the summit of Relativity projects the Absolute and thus produces the image, and from the moment there is image- this is the Logos- there is polarization, that is to say refraction of the Light which in itself is undivided. The good refracted, or the Logos, contains all Perfections possible, it translates the potentiality of the Essence into an inexhaustible unfolding of possibilities, and it is thus the divine "place" of the archetypes.⁵¹

In case it is not clear the sense in which Schuon uses “place” of archetypes, here is Guenon, whose core metaphysics is in agreement with Schuon:

It might be asked if this conception of the Divine Intellect and that of the 'intelligible world' of Plato are identical; or, in other words, whether the 'Ideas' understood in a Platonic sense, are the same as those contained eternally in the Word. It is clearly a question of the 'archetypes of manifested beings in both cases. It would seem, however, at least at first glance, that the 'intelligible world corresponds to supraformal manifestation rather than to pure Being; in other words, according to Hindu terminology, it would be Buddhi envisaged in the Universal order rather than Ātmā, even in a perspective that limits Ātmā to pure Being. It goes without saying that both these points of view are perfectly legitimate.⁵²

Recall that “Pure Being” for these authors refers to the indirectly known unities of personhood “beyond being”, hence his equation of “Pure Being” to “Atma” or “Self”. These persons are the place of Schuon’s realm of “divine names”, gotten from a Neoplatonism influenced Sufi Doctrine⁵³. As the manifestation is in the principle, so Limit is, as itself, the “place of archetypes”, manifest limitedly in the first being, and subsequently in intellect:

⁵¹ Schuon and Nasr.

⁵² Rene Guenon, *Fundamental Symbols The Universal Language of Sacred Science*, ed. by Martin Lings (Quinta Essentia, 1995).

⁵³ Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ‘The World of Imagination and Concept of Space in the Persian Miniature’, *Islamic Quarterly*, p. 6; Naida Muslić, ‘The Salvation Through Love’. <<https://www.orphicinscendence.com/post/the-salvation-through-love>> [accessed 13 June 2021]. I speculate that it is these “divine names” that are the Monotheistic analogue of the aforementioned “Henads” since they have strikingly similar descriptions. The names are God, yet are not directly equated with the “essence” understood precisely in the apophatic sense as the One “which neither is, nor is one”, and who is beyond even names. They name “aspects of the absolute”, yet they are not simply “qualities”, as Schuon specifies (Pg. 59).

In Trinitarian theology, the Absolute in itself corresponds to Being and Power; the Infinite, to Will or Love, therefore to the function of projection or radiation; and the Good, to Intelligence or Knowledge, therefore to the polarization of the potentialities of the Essence. The Absolute, the Good, the Infinite: Sat, Chit, Ānanda. In considering this analogy between the Trinity just mentioned and the Vedantic Ternary—“Being, Consciousness, Beatitude”—it could be asked what relationship there is between the Good and Consciousness (Chit); now the Good, from the moment that it springs as such from the Absolute—which contains it in an undifferentiated or indeterminate manner—coincides with the distinctive Consciousness which the Absolute has of itself; the divine Word, which is the “Knowledge” that God has of Himself, cannot but be the Good, God being able to know Himself as Good only. The principle of radiation or projection—inherent in the Absolute, in the “Father”—corresponds to the “Holy Spirit”, and the principle of polarization or refraction, to the “Son”. The “Son” is to the “Father” what the circle is to the center; and the “Holy Spirit” is to the “Father” what the radius is to the center. And as the radius, which “emanates” from the center, does not stop at the circle but traverses it, it could be said that starting from the circle, the radius is “delegated” by the circle, just as the “Spirit” emanates from the “Father” and is delegated by the “Son”; the nature of the filioque, at once justifiable and problematical, becomes clear with the aid of this image.”⁵⁴

In these specifications, we have an explanation for what could be called a “Monarchian Trinity”, where the Father is the “One God” that unites the two persons⁵⁵. Again, this is only because of the Father’s unique person as *personhood unoriginate*. As the “innascible”, that is, the “God” without origin, name, and therefore peculiarity, “He” gives all peculiarity to the Limit that perfectly mirrors the innascible Father’s “absent presence” of peculiarity in a receptive mode, in the “absently present” peculiarity of the Unlimited Spirit that makes this ineffable unity possible. This self-gift is complete because personhood has no measure. It is not an essence you give limitedly in a measure that “reduces” like essence on a chain of being. Personhood is gift, and full gift. But again, personhood is not an exhausted gift in which the giver ceases to exist. It is its own gift, and it generates difference in non-dual unity. This

Because they are names, they refer to “persons”, and it is these persons Ibn Arabi calls “Lords” that are assigned to each human. This is in fact Ibn Arabi’s understanding of polytheism.

⁵⁴ Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human: A New Translation with Selected Letters (Writings of Frithjof Schuon)*.

⁵⁵ James S. Cutsinger, ‘Disagreeing to Agree: A Christian Response to “A Common Word”’.

difference is maintained via the “peculiarity” of their non-peculiarity. The Father is the non-peculiar innascible giver of all peculiarity, the Son is the non-peculiar receptive “Limit” of this peculiarity. As the principle of discontinuous unity, “he” must himself be distinct from the innascible One, and yet not “inferior”, since he receives all peculiarity and, like the Father, is not himself exclusively one of them. The Spirit, as the non-peculiar “conductor” (and hence also receptor) of peculiarity in the mode of the principle of continuous unity, is the principle by which the Son is all peculiarity in reception, and yet it is because of the Son’s mode of unity (discontinuous) that this facilitating (or “birthing”) of identity does not collapse Son and Spirit. The Father is the originator and “principle” of the Godhead of persons, the Son is himself the lynchpin by which the persons are differentiated, and the Spirit is “herself” the link of “consubstantiality” between persons. All of this, because we refer to persons, is “beyond being” and hence, absolutely simple, beyond even the “minimal complexity” of essence. This is why we can call the Trinity of The One (Father), Limit (Son), and (Unlimited) “One God”, for the One God is the One, and it is the self-gifting unity through which the Son and Spirit are themselves personhood *as persons*. Indeed it is the One that manifests through them⁵⁶, for they are consubstantial.

III

Implications and Conclusion

Drawing from our explanations so far, we are going to find two implications, the second of which solves a strange idea in early Christian theology:

1. The identity of the “Unmoved Mover”.
2. The equation of the Holy Spirit to “Intellect”.

Unmoved Mover

Starting from the first, we recall our argument from motion. The argument seems to end with the purely actual first being, who is in fact purely actual. Is this the prime mover? Well, yes and no. This isn’t a question about history, or about what Proclus and Aristotle thought. We are here finding our own answers, to see where we stand.

The first being is in fact an unmoved mover. It is intellectual essence as such. It is not moved by any “thing”, and yet moves them all. But, it is still contingent, and the unities that spawn it

⁵⁶ D’Hoine and Marije. “the two opposite principles are ‘manifestations of’ the One...the two principles are virtually identical with the First principle, manifesting its presence through their operation”

are themselves beyond movement. The true “centre” of being is the first being, and this is also Schuon’s answer:

To identify oneself with movement is to engender movement and therefore change, the series of movements; to identify oneself with pure being engenders being and therefore the interiorization and transmutation of movement, or the cessation of movement in the Immutable and the Unlimited. Desire is movement, and contemplation is being.⁵⁷

Again, “Being” here refers to the person of “Limit” that straddles the “divine nature” of personhood and the contingent nature of the first being. The unity of the first being is beyond it, hence it is contingent. But the first being is, because of this, the “motionless centre” of the cosmos, the prime mover. This “person” is named Intellect, Logos, and Being from names of the first being due to hypostatic identity, but remains beyond these names in its nature, this transcendence being the very reason it is inseparable from these names. This “prime mover” is also identified with the “primordial adam”, according to the tradition that man is the “central being” that unites all beings:

The Angels are situated in the 'proximity' of the Throne, since they are made of its 'luminous' substance; but they remain in its periphery, the centre being occupied by Ar-Rūh; now Sayyidnā Ādam, in his earthly existence, is far off from the Throne, but he is situated in the central ray which emanates therefrom, at the end of the vertical axis which is the place of Revelation.⁵⁸

Hence the “prime mover” is man himself, as Christ, as the celestial man before all men. This leads us to our next implication

Spirit as Intellect

Justin Martyr says something puzzling in his dialogues with Trypho:

⁵⁷ Schuon and Nasr.

⁵⁸ Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, 1985.

*I shall give you another testimony, my friends, from the Scriptures, that God begot before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, **who is called by the Holy Spirit**, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain, when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father's will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will; just as we see happening among ourselves: for when we give out some word, we beget the word; yet not by abscission, so as to lessen the word [which remains] in us, when we give it out: and just as we see also happening in the case of a fire, which is not lessened when it has kindled [another], but remains the same; and that which has been kindled by it likewise appears to exist by itself, not diminishing that from which it was kindled.⁵⁹*

Unless I am misreading, St. Justin just equated Christ with the Holy Spirit. This is not the only place this occurs in early Christianity. It is in fact gotten from the Scriptures where Christ is called the “life giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15: 45) and similar scriptures:

...none of this is not to say Paul or John applied this spirit-Christology consistently. Both could probably imagine the exalted Jesus as distinct from God's spirit (cf. Cor 13:14).

Yet Paul and John have preserved here the memories of an early Christian experience, one now buried under layers of later theological sediment: Jesus had come back to his disciples as a spirit, a spirit that distributed gifts which only God could supply. In this ecstasy, weighed down by the personal presence of Jesus, Christians began to ponder not only the nature of Christ's exalted existence, but also his identity in relation to God. For, so it seemed, Christ was now the holy spirit, God's very spirit. In this the seeds of a divine Christology were sown.⁶⁰

Of course, we cannot say the “triadic” revelation of God did not exist in the church at the time. It clearly did, as seen in the great commission. What is blurry is the relationship of Son and Spirit, up to the point that they are sometimes identified. There were binitarian and trinitarian currents in the early church, following these currents in the documents of the new testament itself, and these currents often mingled⁶¹.

⁵⁹ ‘CHURCH FATHERS: Dialogue with Trypho, Chapters 55-68 (Justin Martyr)’.

⁶⁰ ‘How Jesus Became God's Holy Spirit – Scribes of the Kingdom’.

⁶¹ John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th Editio (Adam & Charles Black, 1968).

This ambiguity is also present in Schuon. He equates the Intellect at the centre of being, already identified with the “unmoved mover”, with “Spirit”, even the “Holy Spirit” in several places⁶². This is initially puzzling, but disappears in light of the trinitarian theology explained earlier. “Unlimited” – our name for the Holy Spirit here – is the “personal power” of ‘Limit’ – our name for the Son – to be *one person* in its “divine nature” as well as its “created” or contingent nature. It effects the “hypostatic union” of the person of the Son while remaining itself an “unincarnated” person. This “mixture” is the first being, who is Limit as person but Unlimited in Power.

Conceived as simply the power to manifest essence, the first being is indeed “Spirit”. It is “unlimited”, but not as a “person”. The “person” here is Limit, the Son, but the power of unlimited is present in Limit, *through* unlimited’s non-incarnatory presence. Hence, the first being can indeed be called “Holy Spirit” derivatively, and not directly. In calling the first being “Holy Spirit”, you are still referring to the person of the Son, but through the power of the Spirit that makes the identity of Limit with the first being possible. In other words, we are still referring to the Son, but we do so through the fact of the presence of the Spirit in the Son, which can only be manifest in being as power distinct from, and yet continuous with, person.

Conclusion

In the end, we are to return to the beginning, to the point of philosophizing, which is to see the principles in its manifestations, and ascend not just through speech, but actions. None of this matters if we ourselves do not ascend in identity into the unity of unlimited person and realize we never left. As I paraphrased earlier: God became nature that nature might become God. That reality is clearest for the Christian in the hypostatic union that undergirds the incarnation of Christ. And, following Cutsinger, who himself followed Schuon and the great perennialists of the 20th century, the Christian perennialist must see this not as the exclusion of seemingly rival revelations, but as a call to ascend to the source of revelation, where they all meet. I believe in this path, and this essay represents a way to show its validity in practice. Whatever errors here are my own, and I would ask that whatever you do with what is here, it should be in the aim of knowing more the reality we know and that knows us *as us*. Let not my errors be a stumbling block, but a ladder of ascent by negation. I leave this in the hands of the God who

⁶² Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*; Schuon and Nasr.

is also man, through whom we are both embodied and transcend embodiment. May this meagre offering be accepted, as my little piety in the midst of adequacies.

Hail Mary, and praise her Son, the revealer of the triune God.

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Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology, 30.1 (2021), 3–31

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