

The Unfinished Business of Unitarian Theorizing

by Beau Branson and Skylar D. McManus

Background and Occasion

- The “Neglected” Monarchy of the Father.
 - Raised objections to Tuggy’s definitions of “Trinitarian” and “unitarian.”
 - Tuggy responded on his podcast, and this presentation is one of others to follow to respond to him.
- The UCA “affirmation.”
 - **Short version:** “The one God is the Father alone, and Jesus is his human Messiah, who is now exalted as Lord and Savior.”
 - So broad that it ought to seem suspicious to potential “buyers.”
 - This gained an invitation by Tuggy to replace his definitions with better ones.

The Dialectic (“Big Picture”)

I (Beau) see Dale’s overall dialectic as involving two basic arguments, which, *together with his definitions*, are supposed to cause problems for all forms of Trinitarianism.

Dale’s Definition of “Trinitarian Christian Theology”:

- 1) There is one God,
- 2) which or who in some sense contains or consists of three ‘persons’, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
- 3) who are equally divine, and
- 4) (1)-(3) are eternally the case.

The Arguments:

- 1) The Tritheism Problem (AKA 3-gods, threeness/oneness, Logical Problem)
- 2) The “Who Is (/Which One Is) God?” Problem

The Dialectic (“Big Picture”)



Voltron!

(is this what's meant by “tri-personal God”?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yft--fBNqXc>

Suppose a “Voltron God” is what counts as Trinitarian / a “triune” being.

“The Tritheism Problem”: If there are 5 robot-lions (3 divine persons), how is there just 1 robot (1 divine person? 1 God?)

(Could call it the “Predicative Problem”, since it turns on the question of how the *predicate* “is God” or “is divine” works.)

The “Who Is God?” Problem: What does “God” refer to: Father, Son, Spirit... *none of the above?*

(Could call this the “Referential Problem,” since it turns on the question of the referent of “God.”)

Definitions

Christian **unitarianism**: the one God just is (=) the one Jesus calls “Father.”

Christian **trinitarianism**: the one God just is (=) the Trinity; the one god just is the triune god, the tripersonal god.

These slides available at: <https://goo.gl/pZggF7>

From podcast 189, “The Unfinished Business of the Reformation” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koogceUAG50>)

An argument for Christian unitarianism

1. Any Trinity doctrine identifies the one true God (Yahweh) with the Trinity. (def of “Trinity doctrine”)
2. A central New Testament teaching is the identity of the one true God with the Father (only). (Premise)
3. It is not true that the Trinity is identical with the Father (and vice-versa). (Premise)

An argument for Christian unitarianism

4. Therefore, either any Trinity doctrine is false, or a central New Testament teaching is false. (1-3)

5. If a later catholic teaching contradicts a central New Testament teaching, Christians should reject the former and accept the latter.
(Premise)

6. Therefore, Christians should agree with the New Testament teaching that the Father (alone) just is God, and deny the later catholic teaching that God just is the Trinity. (4, 5)

My Goal (Previously)

- **How I understood Tuggy's Dialectic:** Since Tuggy more or less equates "Trinitarianism" with what I call "Egalitarian Trinitarianism," and various forms of Egalitarian Trinitarianism seem to fall prey either to the Tritheism Problem or the "Who Is God?" Problem, it looks like all forms of Trinitarianism face serious difficulties.
- **My Goal (Previously):** Show that *there exists some form of Trinitarianism that does not* fall prey to these problems.
- **My Argument:** I defined what I call "Monarchical Trinitarianism" (MT), on which:
 - (1) "The" One God = the Father (who is the source of the Son and Spirit).
 - (2) The Son and Spirit simply share the same *intrinsic* nature as the Father (but are not *a se*).

I argued this was a counter-example to his definitions (since his definitions count MT as "Unitarian," whereas it intuitively counts as Trinitarian, and is affirmed by myself and various Orthodox theologians).

I also noted that Tuggy's definitions count unitarian and trinitarian theologies as *logically compatible*, which intuitively seems incorrect.

- **Tuggy's Response:** Tuggy stuck to his guns. Does not think his definitions need revision. Simply classifies MTs as "unitarian."

Tuggy's Challenge & Our Response

- **Tuggy's challenge:** Show us why Monarchical Trinitarians (MT's) *shouldn't* count as "unitarian" (and therefore as potential participants in the UCA's vision).
- **Our response:** Tuggy is free to consider MT's to be Unitarian. But his reasoning for doing so raises even deeper problems for his work at present:
 - 1) His narrative about a (*substantive*) disagreement among Orthodox theologians on this point collapses.
 - 2) His recently argued historical narrative about the (*substantive*) development of Trinitarianism collapses.
 - 3) The same *reasoning* he seems to be employing to count MT's as Unitarians, also counts *the vast majority of mainstream Trinitarians* as Unitarians.

Belief Ascriptions

- When *we* say that *somebody* (S) believes “that *p*,” we ascribe to S a belief in whatever proposition *we express* when we say “that *p*.”
- So, for example, if *we* say “S believes that Christ pre-existed,” we ascribe to that person a belief in whatever proposition *we express* when we say “that Christ pre-existed.”
- **Illustration:** Two biblical unitarians on Christ’s “pre-existence.”
 - One says “Christ *didn’t* pre-exist his conception,” meaning (asserting the proposition):
<<that Christ DID NOT have a pre-human life>>
 - Another *says* “Christ pre-existed his conception,” but *not* meaning (*not* asserting the proposition):
<<that Christ DID have a pre-human life>>
<<that Christ existed in God’s foreknowledge>> but only meaning (asserting the proposition):
(which, suppose, the other BU believes too).
- So, suppose we say, “One BU believes that Christ pre-existed, but the other doesn’t.”
 - If by “pre-existed” *we* mean “existed in God’s foreknowledge,” we’re saying one believes the proposition <<that Christ existed in God’s foreknowledge>> and the other doesn’t (which is false).
 - Same result if we use “pre-existed” to mean “had a pre-human life.”
 - Whichever definition we go with, we have to describe them as believing the same propositions (even if they don’t speak the same sentences).
- Do they disagree? **Verbally**, yes. **Substantively**, no.

Verbal and Substantive Monotheism

- In “Tertullian the Unitarian,” Tuggy coins the term “mono-*theos*-ism” for the claim “there is only one being who may properly be described or addressed as ‘god.’”
 - He notes that this neither implies, nor is implied by, monotheism.
- **Let’s Rename this “Verbal Monotheism”:**
There is only one being who may properly be described or addressed as ‘god.’
 - (We agree that there is scriptural warrant for rejecting this.)
- **Contrast this with “Substantive Monotheism”:**
There is one god.

Verbal and Substantive Unitarianism

- (Tuggy wasn't convinced of my (Beau's) criticisms of his definitions, so presumably he will accept the following definitions.)
- If we apply the distinction between Verbal and Substantive Monotheism to Tuggy's definition of (Christian) Unitarianism, we get the following distinction:
- **Verbal Unitarianism:**
 - (1) There is only one being who may properly be described or addressed as 'god,'
 - (2) who is numerically identical with the one Jesus called "Father,"
 - (3) and is not numerically identical to anyone else,
 - ((4) and (1)-(3) are eternally the case?)
- **Substantive Unitarianism:**
 - (1) There is one God,
 - (2) who is numerically identical with the one Jesus called "Father,"
 - (3) and is not numerically identical with anyone else,
 - (4) and (1)-(3) are eternally the case.

“God” and Unitarianism

- In “On Counting Gods,” Tuggy disambiguates the term “God” (or “god”) for us.
 - In one sense, a “god” is just any “deity” (roughly, a supernatural being).
 - In another sense, “God” is an *ultimate or a se* deity.
 - In this latter sense, “God” means the “farthest back being” (ultimate), a being that is itself *a se* (uncaused, without source), and is the source of anything else that exists.
- So, if we plug Tuggy’s definition of “God” into his definition of “Unitarian,” we get **Disambiguated Substantive Unitarianism (DSU)**:
 - (1) There is one **ultimate (*a se*) deity**,
 - (2) who is numerically identical with the one Jesus called “Father,”
 - (3) and is not numerically identical with anyone else,
 - (4) and (1)-(3) are eternally the case.

Some Earlier Distinctions

- In my earlier podcasts, I distinguished the **Weak Monarchy View (WMV)**:
“the Father is the sole source / cause of the Son and Holy Spirit.”
- From the **Strong Monarchy View (SMV)**:
“Strictly speaking, The One God just is the Father.”
- I noted that SMV entails WMV, and I defined “**Monarchical Trinitarianism**” (MT) as the set of models of the Trinity that incorporate SMV. I.e., **those models on which The One God just is the Father**. (NOTE: Not *just* my views; includes later-Rea.)
- I also noted that, WMV is about the weakest and least controversial way one can interpret talk about the “Monarchy of the Father.”
- As we will see, essentially *all* Trinitarians prior to the Reformation (and most afterwards — even among Protestants) affirm WMV under the nomenclature of “eternal processions” or “eternal generation.”

The Root Problem

- The problem is that *WMV alone* rules out the Son and Holy Spirit as *a se* or what Tuggy calls an ultimate.
- Unitarians and Trinitarians will all agree that:
 - (1) All created things have their source in something uncreated.
 - (2) Nothing *outside* the Trinity is uncreated.
 - (3) The Father is not identical to the Son or Holy Spirit.
 - (4) (All of this is eternally the case.)

But within the scope of those assumptions...

DSU is logically equivalent to WMV, which *the vast majority* of Trinitarians endorse.

Compare

- **Disambiguated Substantive Unitarianism (DSU) :**

- (1) There is one **ultimate (*a se*) deity**,
- (2) who is numerically identical with the one Jesus called “Father,”
- (3) and is not numerically identical with anyone else,
- (4) and (1)-(3) are eternally the case.

- **Weak Monarchy View (WMV):**

- The Father is the sole source / cause of the Son and Holy Spirit.

- **Agreed-upon assumptions (AA):**

- (1) All created things have their source in something uncreated.
- (2) Nothing *outside* the Trinity is uncreated.
- (3) The Father is not identical to the Son or Holy Spirit.
- (4) (All of this is eternally the case.)

- Tuggy’s definition of “ultimate” and DSU(1)+(2) entail WMV directly. ✓ (DSU → WMV)
- AA(1)+(2) entail all (uncontroversial) creatures trace back to the triad.
- WMV says the Son and Spirit trace back to the Father, so he alone is ultimate.
- So, AA(1)+(2) and WMV entail DSU(1)+(2), then
- AA(3)+(4) are just there to make things parallel. ✓ (WMV+AA → DSU)

Break

Problem #1: Orthodox Theology

- Recall the discussion about belief ascriptions. Tuggy has ascribed different beliefs to various Orthodox theologians, implying there is a substantive disagreement.
 - Behr and Branson *say* “the One God is the Father.”
 - Louth and Ware *say* “the One God is the Trinity.”
- So, if the *verbal* issue is his concern, we concede the point. There is verbal disagreement here just like between our hypothetical BU’s before.
- But all of them *agree* on the substantive issue: the traditional Orthodox claim (WMV): <<that the Father alone is the “*arche anarchos*” (“source without source”) (ultimate)>>.
- Since, within the scope of our “Agreed Upon Assumptions,” WMV is equivalent to DSU, given *his own definitions* (the reasons for counting Behr and Branson as Unitarians), Tuggy should count Louth and Ware as *Substantive Unitarians* too.
 - But this goes against his reasons for citing Ware and Louth in the first place.
- He *could* still say they have a substantive disagreement *about something*, but nothing he has stated so far give[s] any evidence of this

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

- According to Tuggy's narrative, there was a sudden shift from Unitarian to Trinitarian theology some time during the 4th century.
- But (as we will see in Problem #3), it follows from Tuggy's definitions that the broad consensus of orthodox Christianity has *always been* "unitarian."
- (Strictly speaking, it turns out to be *atheistic* for Tuggy. But since we want to read him charitably, we'll ignore that.)
- So, we get the *first half* of Tuggy's narrative "for free."
- But the *second* half collapses.
 - He turns out to be **incorrect** about 4th century figures *shifting* from Unitarian to Trinitarian.
 - What's more, the *kind of evidence* he gives for his narrative turns out to be **irrelevant**.
 - Just *granting* all of his arguments, we only get a shift away from *verbal* unitarianism.
 - We get *no evidence* any of these figures take the *Trinity* (tri-personal God) to be an ultimate.
 - Indeed, Nazianzen, et al., are *explicit* that only the Father is *a se*, the Son and Spirit aren't.

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

For Gregory Nazianzen, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

...How then are **they [the Son and Spirit] not co-unoriginate (συνάναρχα)**, if they are coeternal? **Because they are from Him, but not after Him.** For what is unoriginate is eternal, but **what is eternal is not necessarily unoriginate (ἀναρχον)**, so long as it is referred to the Father as its source. **Thus, they are not unoriginate (ἀναρχα) with respect to cause (αἰτίῳ);** but clearly the cause (τὸ αἴτιον) is not necessarily older than its effects, for the sun is not older than light... (*Oration 29.3*)

... we admit that, **with respect to being the cause, the Father is greater than the Son** (τῷ αἰτίῳ μείζων ὁ πατήρ τοῦ υἱοῦ)... (*Oration 29.15*)

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

For Gregory Nazianzen, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

... For that the same thing should be at once greater than and equal to the same thing is an impossibility; and the evident solution is that **'greater' refers to origination**, while 'equal' belongs to the nature; and this we acknowledge with much good will. But perhaps some one else will back up our attack on your argument, and assert, that **that [the Son] which is from such a cause is not inferior to that [the Father] which has no cause**; for he [the Son] would share the glory of the unoriginate [=the Father], because he [the Son] is from the unoriginate [=the Father]... For to say that he [the Father] is greater than the Son considered as man, is true, but is no great thing. For what marvel is it if God is greater than man? (*Oration 30.7*)

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

For Gregory Nazianzen, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

...all that the Father has belongs likewise to the Son, **except Causality**... (*Oration 34.10*)

... The Holy Ghost, then, always existed, and exists, and always will exist. He neither had a beginning, nor will He have an end; but He was everlastingly ranged with and numbered with the Father and the Son... All-powerful (even though **all that is of the Spirit is referable to the First Cause, just as is all that is of the Only-begotten**)... (*Oration 41.9*)

(Similar examples could be multiplied, time permitting.)

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

For Gregory of Nyssa, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

For the plea will not avail them in their self-defence, that He is delivered by our Lord to His disciples third in order, and that therefore He is estranged from our ideal of Deity. Where in each case activity in working good shows no diminution or variation whatever, how unreasonable it is to suppose the numerical order to be a sign of any diminution or essential variation! It is as if a man were to see a separate flame burning on three torches (and we will suppose that **the third flame is caused by that of the first being transmitted to the middle, and then kindling the end torch**), and were to maintain that the heat in the first exceeded that of the others; that that next it showed a variation from it in the direction of the less; and that the third could not be called fire at all, though it burnt and shone just like fire, and did everything that fire does... (On the Holy Spirit, Against the Macedonians. NPNF, p.317.)

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

For Gregory of Nyssa, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

Again, all the persons of humanity do not have their being immediately from the same person, but some [have their being] from this person, others from that person, so that there are many differences **both in terms of causes and effects**. But **this is not true of the Holy Trinity**; for it is one and the same person — the Father — from whom the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds. For this reason, then, and in a precise way, we boldly affirm that **the One Cause, along with His effects, is one God**, since He coexists along with them (διὸ δὴ καὶ κυρίως τὸν ἕνα αἴτιον μετὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ αἰτιατῶν ἕνα θεόν φάμεν τεθαρρηκότως, ἐπειδὴ καὶ συνυπάρχει αὐτοῖς)... (*To the Greeks, From Common Concepts*, translation mine.)

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

For Gregory of Nyssa, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

If, however, any one cavils at our argument, on the ground that by not admitting the difference of nature it leads to a mixture and confusion of the Persons, we shall make to such a charge this answer — that while we confess the invariable character of the nature, we do not deny the difference in respect of cause, and that which is caused, by which alone we apprehend that one Person is distinguished from another — by our belief, that is, that one is the Cause, and another is of the Cause; and again in that which is of the Cause we recognize another distinction. For one is **directly from the First Cause**, and **another by that which is directly from the First Cause...**

But in speaking of cause, and of the cause, we do not by these words denote nature (for no one would give the same definition of cause and of nature)... For when we say that one is caused, and that the other is without cause, we do not divide the nature by the word cause, but only indicate the fact that the Son does not exist without generation, nor the Father by generation... (*To Ablabius*. NPNF, p. 336)

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

For Gregory of Nyssa, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

If one were to ask a husbandman about a tree, whether it were planted or had grown of itself, and he were to answer either that the tree had not been planted or that it was the result of planting, would he by that answer declare the nature of the tree? Surely not... **one Person is the Cause, and another is of the Cause**, we can no longer be accused of confounding the definition of the Persons by the community of nature.

Thus, since on the one hand **the idea of cause differentiates the Persons** of the Holy Trinity, declaring that **one exists without a Cause, and another is of the Cause...** (*To Ablabius*. NPNF, p.336.)

For it would be well, I think, to consider in a somewhat careful investigation the exact meaning of the term 'generation'. That **this expression conveys the meaning of existing as the result of some cause** is plain to all, and I suppose there is no need to contend about this point... (*Against Eunomius*, Book II.9)

(Again, similar examples could be multiplied, time permitting.)

Problem #2: Tuggy's Narrative

So, for the very figures Tuggy takes to mark the transition from unitarian to trinitarian, the Father alone is ultimate (a se) (the Son and Spirit are not):

- Both the Gregories are completely explicit that they accept (WMV):
<<that the Father alone is “the *arche anarchos*” (“source without source”) (ultimate)>>.
- (Note: This is *not* controversial among patristics scholars.)
- So, if by “God,” *we* mean “the *arche anarchos*” (“source without source”) (ultimate), then *we* have to describe the Gregories by saying *they both believe*:
- <<that the Father alone is God>>.
- (even if they themselves describe their view differently, due to using “God” differently.)

Eternal Processions

- To say that Y “proceeds” from X is just to say that Y “comes from” X in some way — X is the “source” of Y.
 - In deductive logic, we can say the conclusion “proceeds” from the premises because it is already somehow contained in the premises.
 - $P \rightarrow Q, P, \text{ therefore } Q$. The conclusion Q is contained in $P \rightarrow Q$ already.
 - A more natural example: The existence of children “proceeds” from the the parents; the children “come from” the parents. If there hadn’t been the parents, there wouldn’t have been the children.
- Call any case where something “proceeds” from another a “**procession.**”
 - And call that from which something proceeds a “**principle.**”
- **Illustration:** A bowling ball resting on a pillow (suppose from the first moment of creation).
 - The roundness of the pillow comes from (**proceeds**) from the roundness of the bowling ball resting on it, and always has.
 - The bowling ball is the **principle / cause / source** of the pillow’s roundness.

Eternal Processions

- So, to say that there are eternal processions in the Trinity is to say that there is at least one divine Person who is a principle of another.
 - Instead of “principle” we might also say “root,” or “cause.”
- The eternal processions are traditionally taken to be:
 - (1) **begetting**, where the Father is the principle of Son;
 - (2) **spiration**, where the Father (and the Son, on the *filioque*) is the principle of the Holy Spirit.
- **An analogy:** The sun, its light, and its heat.
 - The sun is **principle** from which light and heat **proceed**.
 - And yet, if the sun had not existed, neither would its light or heat.
 - Also, the sun doesn't exist *apart from* its light and heat.

Problem #3: The Tradition

- For Tuggy, “God” is (1) a **deity** and (2) an **ultimate** (*a se*).
 - But as we will see, the broad consensus historically, not only in the (Orthodox) East, but also in the West, is that the Father meets both of these conditions (the Son and Spirit *don't*).
 - (Typically in the West this is expressed as the Father being the “principium” or “source.”)
- So, if we adopt Tuggy’s definition of “God,” the broad consensus historically, in both East and West, is that the Father alone is God.
 - In other words, given Tuggy’s reasoning for counting MT’s as unitarians, ***most Christians throughout history turn out to be Substantive Unitarians.***
- Another way to state our argument:
 - (1) According to Tuggy’s definitions, if the proposition:
<<that the Father is an *ultimate* deity (*a se*) (and the Son and Spirit *aren't* ultimate / *a se*)>>
is true on a certain theology, that theology counts as “(subordinationist) unitarianism.”
 - (2) If the doctrine of eternal processions is true on a certain theology, then the proposition:
<<that the Father is an *ultimate* deity (*a se*) (and the Son and Spirit *aren't* ultimate / *a se*)>>
is true on that theology.
 - (3) So, if the doctrine of eternal processions is true on a certain theology, then (according to Tuggy’s definitions) that theology counts as “(subordinationist) unitarianism.”

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- (See Mark Edwards' recent paper, "Is Subordinationism a Heresy?" in our *TheoLogica* issue. <https://ojs.uclouvain.be/index.php/theologica/article/view/23803>)
- Abstract: The modern resurgence of orthodoxy in Anglican circles takes as its cardinal tenet the eternal coinherence of three persons in the one Godhead, equal in substance, rank and power. This is assumed to be the doctrine of the Nicene Council of 325, and the putative heresy that denies it is known by the term subordinationism. Although the ample lexicon of Greek heresiology supplies no clear antecedent for this term, the charge of subordinationism is thought to imperil any claim to be teaching in the catholic tradition, even if the teacher is Barth or Rahner. The confidence with which these accusations are levelled, however, seems to be in an inverse ratio to the accuser's knowledge of history, for neither in New Testament scholarship nor at the cutting edge of the modern study of patristics will one find much evidence that subordinationism is even an anomaly, let alone an aberration from the biblical or conciliar norm. It is only in modern theology, not in the writings of empirical historians, that the Gorgon's head of Arius is held up to those who question the strict equality of persons. At the same time, we must not forget that the systematician's reading of Nicaea was until recently also that of the historian. No doubt the reason is partly that until the last half-century every historian was also a confessional theologian; but there is also a certain truth in the older approach so long as some pains are taken to define "subordination".

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **“The Cappadocians** had in fact a number of ways whereby they safeguarded the unique character of the divine unity: in particular, through their understanding of **the Father as the sole source and fountainhead of hypostatic subsistence within the Trinity (the ‘monarchy’ of the Father)...**” (Kallistos Ware, “The Holy Trinity: Paradigm of the Human Person,” in *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue*, 234)
- **Orthodox Christianity:** “. . . It is well known that **what safeguards the oneness of God and prevents the doctrine of the Holy Trinity from lapsing into tritheism is the person of the Father. The “monarchy of the Father”** indicates clearly that the coincidence and coaffirmation of unity and plurality in the Holy Trinity is exercised by a person — the Father.” (John Penteleimon Manoussakis, “Primacy and Ecclesiology: The State of the Question,” 235).

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Gregory Palamas:** “They are ignorant, because they have not yet learned that **the supreme Trinity is none other than God himself** [ἡ ἀνωτάτω τριάς οὐκ ἕτερος, ἀλλ’ αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ θεός] and that the supreme unity is none other than God himself; and this presents no obstacle to the distinction of the unity from the Trinity” (*The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz, ch. 113)

And yet...

- “The Father is **without beginning** [Πατήρ ἀναρχος], not only as being outside time, but **also as being in every way without cause** [κατά πάντα τρόπον αναίτιος]. **He alone is the cause, root and source** [μόνος αἰτία και ρίζα και πηγή] **of the Godhead** beheld in the Son and the Holy Spirit; He alone is the primary cause of what has come into being; He is not the Creator alone, but **the sole Father** of the one Son and **the sole Originator** of the one Holy Spirit. He always is, and is always the Father, and always the sole Father and Originator, **greater than the Son and the Spirit, but only as cause**; in all other respects He is the same as Them and equal in honor” (“Confession of the Orthodox Faith,” [source](#); Greek: PG 151:764D-765A)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Roman Catholicism:** "...[T]he eternal order of the divine persons in their consubstantial communion implies that the Father, as **"the principle without principle"**, is **the first origin** of the Spirit, but also that as Father of the only Son, he is, with the Son, the single principle from which the Holy Spirit proceeds" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 248)
- **"... Whatever the Father is or has, He does not have from another, but from Himself; and He is the principle without principle. Whatever the Son is or has, He has from the Father, and is the principle from a principle. Whatever the Holy Spirit is or has, He has simultaneously from the Father and the Son. But the Father and the Son are not two principles of the Holy Spirit, but one principle, just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of the creature, but one principle..."** (Denzinger no. 1331. From the Papal Bull of Pope Eugene IV, *"Cantate Domino"*, dated February 4, 1442.)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Martin Luther:** “...when I go beyond and outside of creation or the creature and move into the internal, incomprehensible essence of divine nature, I find that Holy Scripture teaches me—for reason counts for nought in this sphere—that the Father is a different and distinct nature from the Son in the one indivisible and eternal Godhead. The difference is that **He is the Father and does not derive His Godhead from the Son or anyone else.** The Son is a Person distinct from the Father in the same, one paternal Godhead. The difference is that **He is the Son and that He does not have the Godhead from Himself, nor from anyone else but the Father,** since He was born of the Father from eternity. The Holy Spirit is a Person distinct from the Father and the Son in the same, one Godhead. The difference is that **He is the Holy Spirit, who eternally proceeds both from the Father and from the Son, and who does not have the Godhead from Himself nor from anyone else but from both the Father and the Son,** and all of this from eternity to eternity. With this belief I guard against the heresy of Sabellius and his ilk, of Jews, Mohammed, and all others who presume to be smarter than God Himself. (“Treatise on the Last Words of David,” *Luther’s Works, Vol. 15*)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Martin Luther:** "... the Father is our God, the Son is our God, and the Holy Spirit is our God, and yet there are not three gods, but only one God. Likewise, the Holy Ghost sanctifies Christendom, so does the Father, so does the Son, and still there are not three sanctifiers, but only one Sanctifier, etc. "The works of the Trinity to the outside are not divisible." All of this has been said so that we may recognize and believe in three distinct Persons in the one Godhead and not jumble the Persons together nor divide the essence. **The distinction of the Father, as we have heard, is this, that He derived His deity from no one, but gave it from eternity, through the eternal birth, to the Son.** Therefore the Son is God and Creator, just like the Father, **but the Son derived all of this from the Father, and not, in turn, the Father from the Son.** The Father does not owe the fact that He is God and Creator to the Son, but the Son owes the fact that He is God and Creator to the Father. And the fact that Father and Son are God and Creator they do not owe to the Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit owes the fact that He is God and Creator to the Father and the Son. Thus the words "God Almighty, Creator" are found [in the Creed] as attributes of the Father and not of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to mark the distinction of the Father from the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead, again, the distinction of the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the distinction of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son; **namely, that the Father is the source, or the fountainhead (if we may use that term as the fathers do) of the Godhead, that the Son derives it from Him and that the Holy Spirit derives it from Him and the Son, and not vice versa.** ("Treatise on the Last Words of David," *Luther's Works, Vol. 15*)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Tübingen Theologians (Lutherans):** The Father, indeed, is the first hypostasis of the All-Holy Trinity, for **He is the origin, source, and cause of the others [Son and Holy Spirit]**. And the Son is the second [hypostasis], **by reason of origin** but not of time, being posterior to the Father and anterior to the Holy Spirit. Also, the Holy Spirit is the third [hypostasis], being posterior to both [Father and Son] **by reason of origin**. (Correspondence with Jeremias II, Patriarch of Constantinople)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Tübingen Theologians (Lutherans):** Indeed, it is a matter of perfection that the Father with the Son, but not without Him, is to emit the Holy Spirit. And even though the two, the Father and the Son, emit the one, the Holy Spirit, yet they do not emit Him [the Spirit] as two, separately and distinctly, but they emit Him as one conjoined together; and **the primacy of the emission returns to the Father, who indeed has given this perfect power of breathing to the Son** through the begetting, as Augustine in book fifteen in *The Holy Trinity* says: **from whom the Son has [power] to be God; certainly, from the same He has the [power] so that the Holy Spirit proceeds from Him [the Son] also...** the Spirit, being second to the Son by virtue of origin, cannot concur with the Father in the begetting of the Son, and much less be, with the Son, also the cause of the Father, where indeed the Father precedes both. **The Father is the origin and cause of both [the Son and the Spirit], bringing each forth from His own essence...** (Correspondence with Jeremias II, Patriarch of Constantinople)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Tübingen Theologians (Lutherans):** In view of this, then, **we are not denying at all that the Father is the prime origin and source from which all things flow**, while the Son and the Spirit, as the cause, are caused from it [the source which is the Father], according to Gregory the Theologian... **the Father is the origin and the cause of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, and [the Father] is the emitter of the Spirit, not, however, without the Son who preceded the Spirit by origin. And to all this we further set forth that the Holy Spirit proceeds directly from both together, as from one essential source, however the two differ as to [hypostatic] being but not [as] to the substance in essence, so that the Father and the Son do not risk becoming one hypostasis in number by virtue of the one activity of emission... **Again, there should not be two prime origins.** (Correspondence with Jeremias II, Patriarch of Constantinople)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Calvin:** Therefore we say that the deity in an absolute sense exists of itself; whence likewise we confess that the Son, since he is God, exists of himself, **but not in respect of his Person;** indeed, since he is the Son, we say that he exists **from the Father.** Thus **his essence** is without beginning; while **the beginning of his person is God himself.** (*Institutes* I.13.25)
- (*Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 2014 by Brannon Ellis is a thorough discussion of Calvin himself. Spoiler alert: Much controversy surrounded Calvin's applying the language of aseity and "autotheity" to the Son. But the gist of his view is probably Muller's.):
<https://books.google.com/books?id=izg4zrSCy58C&printsec=frontcover>
- A recent lecture on the aseity of the Son by a Reformed scholar:
<https://faculty.wts.edu/lectures/the-aseity-of-the-son/>
- Article on B. B. Warfield's "revision" of the Trinity by Scott Swain:
<https://books.google.com/books?id=PiVwDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover>

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **(The Majority of) Reformed Protestants:** “Thus, the primary positive **personal property of the Father** is that **he is *a se***, of or from himself. **This *aseitas***, moreover, is **not merely the essential *aseitas*** common to all persons of the Trinity, it is **also the personal property of the Father:** the Father is **utterly self-existent**, not only as God but also as Father—nor does the Father ever work by the power of another. The Father, **unlike the Son and the Spirit, has no *principium*: he is *ἀναρχον***, whether according to essence or according to person. (The Son and the Spirit can be considered as existing *a se* only according to essence, given that **their persons proceed from the Father as the *principium* of the Godhead.**)” (Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, volume 4: The Triunity of God*, 253)
- “[That Christ is *autotheos*] had been a point of controversy with both the antitrinitarians and with Rome since the time of Calvin, and in the course of the development of Reformed dogmatics in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth century, it became not only **the distinctive feature of Reformed trinitarianism** but also a crucial point, defended against any and all opponents” (Ibid., 324)

Some more resources here:

<http://articulifidei.blogspot.com/2015/10/john-calvin-on-trinity-epoch-in-history.html>

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **(The Majority of) Reformed Protestants:** “The Reformed orthodox . . . define the consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father as the **essential *aseitas*** of each of the three persons. In this definition, they distinguish between ***aseitas personalis*** and ***aseitas essentialis***: the former term, **personal aseity**, involves a trinitarian error; and the latter term, **essential aseity**, interprets *homoousios* correctly. Thus, insofar as the *deitas*, or divinity, of the Son and Spirit is communicated, which is to say, insofar as they are **persons in relation to the Father**, **they are not a se, but a *Patre***, from the Father. *Aseitas*, therefore, does not indicate an *autoprosōpon*, a person of itself. Nevertheless the *deitas* that the Son and Spirit have fully and completely is not a derived deity or divinity. In order to be truly God, the Son and Spirit, considered according to their divinity or according to the divine essence that is theirs, must be *autotheos* and have the attribute of [essential] *aseitas*. The Reformed doctrine, then, acknowledges the *aseitas of the divine essence* as such in each of the persons and, consequently, the *aseitas* of the Son and the Spirit considered *essentialiter*. The doctrinal alternative, as found in Socinianism and Arminianism, is the essential subordination of the Son and Spirit on grounds of generation and procession” (Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd ed., *aseitas* q.v., pp. 41-42)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Brian Leftow (?)**: “The **causal relations** [between God’s life-streams] are those of the **Trinitarian processions**: the Father ‘begetting’ the Son, the Father and the Son ‘spirating’ the Spirit. . . . The Trinitarian relations of generation directly link entire streams: every maximal event in the Father’s stream has or contains a begetting relation to an appropriate event or set of events in the Son’s stream” ([“A Latin Trinity,”](#) 314)
- **William Hasker**:
 - “God the Father eternally communicates the totality of the one undivided divine nature to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and in so doing **brings about the existence** of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 220)
 - It “would take an **extraordinarily powerful objection** to justify rejecting the doctrine of processions” (Ibid., 223)
- “God from God: the essential dependence model of eternal generation” recent article by Mark Makin: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000197>
- (Video lecture at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xysg50W4S-k&feature=youtu.be>)

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **Augustine:** “... What the Lord, therefore, said: ‘whom I will send you from the Father,’ shows that He is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, for when He had also said: ‘whom the Father will send,’ He added, ‘in my name.’ He did not, however, say ‘whom the Father will send from me,’ as He had said: ‘whom I will send you from the Father’; thus He clearly showed that **the Father is the principle of the whole divinity**, or to speak more precisely, **of the whole Godhead**. He, therefore, who proceeds from the Father and the Son [the Spirit], is referred back to **Him** of whom the Son was born [the Father].” (*De Trinitate* IV. 20)
- **Aquinas:** [*Summa Theologiae* I.33.1](#), “Whether it belongs to the Father to be **the principle?**”

...On the contrary, Augustine says, “**The Father is the Principle of the whole Deity.**”

I answer that, The word “principle” signifies only **that whence another proceeds**: since anything whence something proceeds in any way we call a principle; and conversely. As the Father then is the one whence another proceeds, it follows that the Father is a principle.

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- **The Athanasian Creed:**

- And the catholic faith is this: that **we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;** neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence... like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. **The Father is made from no one; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is from the Father and the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding.** So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

- *The Athanasian Creed (Latin):*

Pater **a nullo** est factus;
nec creatus, nec genitus.

Filius **a Patre solo** est;
non factus, nec creatus, sed genitus.

Spiritus Sanctus **a Patre et Filio;**
non factus, nec creatus, nec genitus,
sed procedens.

- *The Athanasian Creed (English):*

The Father is made **from no one**;
neither created, nor begotten.

The Son is **from the Father alone**;
not made, nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Ghost is **from the Father
and of the Son**;
neither made, nor created, nor
begotten; but proceeding.

Problem #3: The Tradition

So who accepts the doctrine of divine processions?

In short, ***everybody until the time of the Reformation — and most thereafter.***

So, if Tuggy's reasoning for counting MT as Unitarianism is sound, *almost the entire Mainstream Trinitarian tradition counts as Unitarian.*

Also, since only (some) Protestants deny WMV (eternal processions), this is a *purely intra-Protestant* dispute. *All non-Protestants* count as "Unitarian."

Put it this way: The mainstream tradition endorses the claim:

- <<that the Father alone is "the *arche anarchos*" ("source without source") (ultimate)>>

Again, if by "God," *we* mean "the *arche anarchos*" ("source without source") (ultimate), then *we* have to describe the tradition as endorsing the claim:

- <<that the Father alone is God>>.

Break

Verbal and Substantive Unitarianism

- Recall our options for understanding “Unitarianism”:
- **Verbal Unitarianism:**
 - (1) There is only one being who may properly be described or addressed as ‘god,’
 - (2) who is numerically identical with the one Jesus called “Father,”
 - (3) and is not numerically identical to anyone else,
 - ((4) and (1)-(3) are eternally the case?)
- **Disambiguated Substantive Unitarianism (DSU) [= Substantive Unitarianism + Tuggy’s definition of “God”]:**
 - (1) There is one **ultimate (*a se*) deity**,
 - (2) who is numerically identical with the one Jesus called “Father,”
 - (3) and is not numerically identical with anyone else,
 - (4) and (1)-(3) are eternally the case.

We’ve seen three problems for DSU. What should we make of all of this?

Our Dilemma for Tuggy

If we keep Tuggy's current definitions of "God" and "Unitarian," we get the following dilemma:

Horn 1: Tuggy can say his concern *really is* with Verbal (*not* Substantive) Unitarianism.

Horn 2: Bite the bullet: Everybody is a Unitarian!

Maybe Tuggy is OK with one of these.
If not, what are our other options?



Two Ways Out of the Dilemma

Since the dilemma arises out of simply plugging Tuggy's definition of "God" into his definition of "Unitarian," there are only two ways to escape the above dilemma:

Revision 1: Revise the definition of "God."

Revision 2: Revise the definition of "Unitarian."

Let's look at pros and cons of all four of these options.

Horn 1: Verbal unitarianism

Pros:

- All of the evidence and argument Tuggy has presented for his conclusions:
 - Disagreement among Orthodox theologians
 - Sudden shift from unitarian to trinitarian theology during the 4th century
 - MT counts as unitarian (but Roman Catholicism, etc., doesn't)

turns out to be at least *logically relevant*, and maybe even persuasive, if we limit our conclusion to merely verbal unitarianism.

Cons:

- Just as Verbal Monotheism is logically independent from Substantive Monotheism, Verbal unitarianism is logically independent from Substantive unitarianism
- Not clear why the discussion is even interesting.
Essentially a sort of superstition about language.

Horn 2: Bite the bullet

Pros:

- The arguments from Tuggy's overall dialectic against "Trinitarianism" (so defined) would turn out still to be powerful arguments.
- The first half of the historical narrative comes for free.

Cons:

- The second half of the historical narrative collapses.
- Since the arguments from Tuggy's overall dialectic don't count against "unitarianism," and mainstream Trinitarianism gets counted as "unitarianism," those arguments won't be relevant to mainstream Trinitarians (though new arguments could be developed).
- *Without new arguments, no practical issue for most Trinitarians. Catholics, Orthodox, traditional Protestants, don't need to go to a different church or abandon their substantive beliefs — they simply have to adopt a different label.*
- Also, without new arguments, it becomes a purely *intra-Protestant debate*.

Revision 1: Definition of “God”

Pros:

- If we defined “God” as something like “a being with the divine *ousia*,” it might at least be possible to wield the Tritheism Problem (and/or “Who Is God?” Problem) against views that incorporate WMV / the doctrine of eternal processions.
 - It follows *directly from* the current definition of “God,” that these don’t apply to theologies that incorporate WMV / the doctrine of eternal processions (regardless of whether we *classify* CT as Unitarian or Trinitarian.) A change here could at least open up *possibilities* for arguments.
 - (Gregory of Nyssa has already responded to such arguments, and my dissertation formulates his response in predicate logic and gives a model-theoretic consistency proof for his view. Still, at least on that option there are premises one can deny, namely: (1) a Davidsonian metaphysics of event individuation, and (2) a certain semantics for counting by agent nouns).

Cons:

- This sort of nearby replacement undermines the common Biblical Unitarian point that “God” *doesn’t* predicate essence. (Otherwise Moses has the divine *ousia*.)
- Would any other definition be *at least as plausible* as the one Tuggy has already given (*and* still raise problems for Trinitarianism)? (The replacement may be a downgrade.)

Revision 2: Definition of “Unitarian”

Pros:

- Few repercussions to Tuggy’s published work.
 - E.g., it *could* still turn out that Tertullian is a unitarian on some other definition.
- This might help tighten up the UCA “affirmation.”
 - Might present a more unified theology, rather than a couple of propositions surrounded by just about anything else somebody wants to believe.
 - Addresses practical concerns.
 - It’s difficult to see what currently keeps something like the Crystal Cathedral from occurring.
 - Why think the more people think about Christ’s humanity, the closer they get to BU?
- Would fit better with Tuggy’s statements about Trinitarianism being a “herd of jostling, competing theories” (i.e., would make Unitarianism at least *less of a hodge-podge* itself).

Cons:

- MT’s would no longer be counted as Unitarians (and may count as Trinitarians).

In Conclusion

- Tuggy’s definitions of “Unitarian” and “God” raise three problems:
 - 1) His evidence for a deep disagreement among Orthodox theologians collapses.
 - 2) His historical narrative about the development of Trinitarianism collapses.
 - 3) The same *reasoning* he employs to count MT’s as Unitarians, also counts the vast majority of mainstream Trinitarians as Unitarians.
- This raises a dilemma for him, where either:
 - (1) he can say his concern is actually a purely verbal issue, or
 - (2) admit the three problems above — any theology that accepts the doctrine of divine processions counts as Substantive Unitarianism.
- He can avoid that dilemma only by either
 - (A) revising his definition of “god,” or
 - (B) revising his definition of “unitarian.”
- We hope this helps brings some clarity to the discussion, and we wish Dale well in thinking through a response.