9 Between history and speculation: Christian trinitarian thinking after the Reformation

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That the Christian dogma of the Trinity has a history, meaning that it was not given entirely, once and for all, by revelation, was one of the most profoundly transformative and consequential claims for Christian theology in the post-Reformation period. But contemporary theology has recast this history of the dogma of the Trinity in a way that is at variance with the development of post-Reformation thought. The “ditch” between history and revelation has been reopened, to put it briefly. In the words of the Orthodox theologian Pavel Florensky: “the single word homoousios expressed not only a Christological dogma but also a spiritual evaluation of the rational laws of thought. Here rationality was given a death blow.” Now, as Florensky and others propose, the Trinity’s story is plotted as the death of “rationality.” The specific concepts employed to articulate how three things can be one thing (tres res sunt una res, the classic medieval proposition for the Trinity) are seen as having been, from the very origins of the doctrine’s development, a defiance of human reason. In this account, revelation wins the battle with reason, and faith is victorious over history.

One term—contextualized exclusively by the Christian dogma of the Son’s eternal co-equality with the Father—subverts the entire semantic field of language’s capacity to refer to reality and the logic underlying this referential capacity. The interruption of reason by language used theologically creates a new system for relating language, thought, and reality, and in this way, the trinitarian axiom of a Christian theological system is pitted against the psychological, anthropological, and philosophical constituents of any human rational system.

I will refer to this historical narrative, with its theological authorizations, that pits revelation against its binary opposite, reason, as the “received” story. Much is at stake in seeing the history of the doctrine of the Trinity as conceptually constructed by binary opposites, namely Christian orthodoxy as a received single tradition. Hence it is told in the drama of historical protagonists fighting to establish the boundaries
of Christian orthodoxy and heresy against their opponents, in polemical relationship to each other. To put the matter of stakes another way, the Trinity is taken to be the dogma by which Christianity, or one normative account of Christianity, stands or falls.

Challenges to the received story have recently come from history (as indeed they have done since the eighteenth century). New historiographies are calling the struggle between orthodoxy and heresy into historical question. Recent studies in New Testament and ancient Christianity, in particular, see the initial development of Christianity in social, religious, political, and gender perspectives that effectively challenge a simple theological either-or. Already in the early nineteenth century Friedrich Schleiermacher was plumbing the second and third centuries for an interpretation of developing trinitarian thinking that ran alongside what would later become the dominant Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity. Schleiermacher's fate, alas, was sealed in the history of Christianity by his suspect trinitarian view. Yet his call to historical-critical examination of Christian origins remains. We have arrived back at a Schleiermacherian moment: the traditional boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy are being complicated by new historical visions that will inevitably have radical implications for the designation of trinitarian orthodoxy in the future. It may even be that trinitarian theologies will see new aspects to God's infinite being, which is always more interesting than a dominant theology can define.

I intend in this chapter to develop another story about the Trinity in the history of post-Reformation thought. The received story that sees the Trinity as a triumph of orthodoxy represents the Enlightenment as eroding the fundamental doctrinal pillars of Christianity. Yet this caricature of the Enlightenment (singular, whereas historians have recently shown the multiplicity over time and space of the protean movement), with its concomitant demand among cultural despisers of modernity that Christians resist it, must be questioned as to its representation of what happened. While this is an undertaking beyond the scope of this chapter, my goal here is to adumbrate another story, messier than the received history of binary opposition. This alternative story, rather than demarcating the boundary between revelation and reason in antithesis, considers the far-reaching and exciting contributions of the Trinity to modern thinking. This entails a reinterpretation of Trinity in relation to Enlightenment.

I develop this alternative history chronologically, beginning with its anticipations in Luther and turning next to the interaction between history and system in eighteenth-century Protestant Orthodoxy and

Pietism. I end with the trinitarian systems of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher. I argue that these paved the way for the Trinitarian "renaissance" in twentieth-century theology. The culmination of this revised story is the Trinity as the fundamental axiom of theological systems; trinitarian theology free from the rejection of modernity is the result of post-Reformation efforts to think creatively through the Trinity between history and speculation.

HISTORICAL SEMANTICS: LUTHER'S EXAMPLE OF THE HOMOIOUSIOS

My starting point is the sixteenth-century Reformation, in particular an incident in Martin Luther's later life that indicates his increasing awareness of the historicity of trinitarian-theological terms. Although a similar story can also be found in John Calvin's dealings with Michael Servetus, I use Luther to detect the beginnings of a historical semantics in the Reformation, anticipating new possibilities of relating Trinity to its history.

Toward the end of his life, between 1542 and 1545, Luther held four disputations on a topic unusual for him. The Trinity, a doctrine that the Reformer contended was never implicated in his conflict with Rome, was under attack, Luther averred. The dispute of 1543 records how Luther himself conceptualizes the Trinity in such a way as to open up, on historical grounds, the diversity of terms available to refer to the Trinity. His immediate historical context gives evidence of emerging differences in how the Trinity of the Christian God was coming to be interpreted. Luther writes, "Our adversaries... arc fanatics about words, because they want us to demonstrate the truth of the trinitarian article to them, just as they wanted the Arians to do, by asking us to assent to the term homoiousios." Luther articulates here surprising flexibility about a precise technical trinitarian term. Homoiousios cannot be taken as the transhistorical guarantor at the linguistic level about the intra-trinitarian relations. Rather the term is used adequately only when it is understood to convey the co-equality of the subjects Father and Son to which it refers. For Luther the res has priority over its corresponding verbum.

This disputational record illustrates how Luther situates theological articulation in a broader philosophical theory about language, which is meaning, and referent. The privileging of res over verbum represents Luther's theory about language, particularly explicit in his semantic theory. A term's meaning is designated by its interrelations with other
terms, this meaning renders the term's capacity to refer to a subject that is experienced, understood, and known. The theological contextualization of the language–subject relation is of particular concern to Luther in relation to the Trinity. The primary challenge presented by trinitarian terms is their referent in eternity. Trinitarian terms, such as homoousios, are for Luther a "stammering" and "babbling." The terms refer to a subject in eternity, but are unable to convey any meaning beyond the most minimal determination. The semantics of eternity and co-equality are oddly introduced as the meaning of terms that are inevitably tense and differentiated as separate "things." Luther's response to this theological case of a philosophical problem is not to create an entirely new theo-logic that would explain the trinitarian relations. Rather, Luther makes use of the disputations to clarify an adequate meaning of the doctrine and to separate true from false interpretations by appealing to philosophical tools, logic, semantics, and metaphysics. Trinitarian terms, even terms taken as referring to an eternal subject, are not ahistorical foils to rationality, but are articulated in history in order that their meanings can be explored, determined to some extent, and understood, at least a bit.

The issue of semantics would turn on the historical meanings of trinitarian terms and conceptions in Bible, creed, and theological tradition. Although Luther and Calvin appealed to semantics in order to come up with arguments for the Trinity's truth, they did not go as far in pressing a historical semantics as some of their contemporaries and later theologians did. The Reformers still assumed that the normative texts of Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, and creeds, equivocated between their trinitarian referent. Different terms in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were still taken in the same sense of the homoousios dogma.

The equivocation was increasingly questioned. The divine referent described in the Hebrew Bible, the "God of Israel," could not be seen on historical grounds as semantically identical with either the "prototrinitarian" God of the New Testament e.g., the trinitarian benediction in 2 Cor 13:13 and the baptismal formula of the Great Commissioning in Mt 28:19 or the explicitly articulated Trinity of the fourth-century Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed. The breakdown of semantic unity had to do with the growing awareness that a historicized semantics was required in order to understand the Trinity in relation to its history. The development of unitarian views of the Christian God are implied by these Reformation and early post-Reformation developments in contextualizing the historical-cultural meanings of trinitarian conceptions. This historicized semantics opened up new metaphysical possibilities of conceiving the eternal distinctions in God and their relations to world history. If meanings of trinitarian concepts differed in history, then their accompanying metaphysic would require revision. History and speculation would become the two interwoven story lines of the Trinity's post-Reformation history.

**SYSTEM AND SALVATION: PROTESTANT ORTHODOXY AND PIETISM**

New views of empiricism and rationalism drove the search for knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the proto-
"Enlightenment," in Berlin and Paris, Edinburgh and Boston. A consensus of the received story of Christian ideas pits reason against revelation. Whether or not doctrinal content is deemed "above reason," maybe even "contrary to reason," Christian mystery is trumped by reason. The question is not whether but the extent to which accommodation must occur, not whether it must, but how fierce the resistance.

But another story can be told about the Trinity in the Enlightenment. By studying two ecumenically representative Christian theologies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we can see how the idea of Trini
ty was developed under the cultural conditions of deepening methodological consciousness about speculation and experience. I begin this section by showing how Protestant theologians articulated the Trinity as a function of their doctrinal systems. The theological task in post-
Reformation orthodoxies, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic, was shaped by, as it contributed to, the developing requirements for academic (wissenschaftlich) rationality as system, and the Trinity's place in these systems was integral to a broader cultural-philosophical effort to set up the system as the paradigm of scientific knowledge. I conclude this section by showing how Pietist traditions pressed historical and experiential dimensions of Christianity in ways that were expressive of cultural-philosophical efforts to secure the limits and possibilities of reason in relation to experience. Sometimes the doctrine of the Trinity challenged these limits; sometimes the limits were applied to trinitarian claims. Nevertheless, this alternative story explores how the Trinity was creatively integrated into ways of thinking and experiencing congruent to modernity's development.

**Trinity and system in Protestant orthodoxy**

The idea of "system" is immensely important for understanding how the Trinity is contextualized in post-Reformation thinking. This importance is, first of all, historical. The genre in which Protestant
orthodox theologians conceived their theologies was the system. Their systems were the immediate blueprint for Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Der christliche Glaube (The Christian Faith, 1820 and 1830–31), recognized as the foundational text of modern theology. Consensus still continues to claim system’s advantage for presenting theological knowledge, although in recent theology, system’s capacity for comprehensiveness is called into question on experiential grounds. The historical significance of system, moreover, immediately implies a constructive-theological impact. Although Protestant orthodoxy is commonly seen as a “systematizing” movement, organizing the occasional and literally diverse writings of the Protestant Reformers, its connection to the cultural-philosophical emergence of system casts its theological development in the light of seventeenth-century academic (wissenschaftlich) thinking.

The sixteenth-century Reformer Philipp Melanchthon was the first link to subsequent systematization. His Loca communis, begun in 1521 and emended until as late as 1543, organized the main theological topics (loci) as they are treated in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Subsequent theological construction leaves this exegetical format behind: post-Reformation theologies are self-consciously constructed as systems that explicitly follow rules of formal construction. This systematization of theological truths was predicated on the broader philosophical consensus that system fulfills the requirements for knowledge (scientia in Latin, Wissenschaft in German). From the earliest geometric systems constructed as strict logical deductions from axioms, to the later systems that adapted deductive demonstration to the subject matter of history, such as religion, systematization represented the Western academic form for organizing ideas. Its culmination was achieved by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the founder of the Prussian Academy of Sciences, who pronounced “C’est là, mon système” upon completion of his Monadologie. From this point on, “scientific” means “systematic,” and for theology, this identification is no exception.

The systematic assignment of the Trinity in Protestant orthodoxy systems is connected to the crucial question regarding the Bible and the Trinity that was opened in the sixteenth century. The system gave theology a solution to the terminological discrepancies that Luther had already encountered. The prolegomena to the system, itself an idiosyncratic outcome of the Reformation, circumscribed theology’s nature and task, particularly as the task’s requirements and sources were determined by scripture. Although this circumscription is commonly assumed to be determined by confessional polemics between Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic traditions, its contextualization in cultural-philosophical questions of systematic construction is of even greater significance. System as the developing form of scientific thinking implied adaptation by different disciplines defining their respective subject matters, particularly if that subject matter could not be strictly deduced from axioms, as was the case with any discipline relying on the interpretation of historical texts. A significant and long-lasting achievement of Protestant orthodoxy is the highly developed doctrine of scripture. The scriptures were the “given” foundations of theology, and their implications for distinct theological methods therefore required clarification.

Theology’s subject matter was considered a reality, given in scripture, and explicated by the doctrines of God and the Trinity. These two doctrines were located in part 1 of orthodox systems, right after the prolegomena in the section entitled “Doctrine of God, the goal [finis] of theology.” Prolegomena and part 1 were intimately connected by the realist preoccupation with theology’s subject matter. Theology’s final goal is the divine res, God, and as such this goal establishes the rationale for integrating Bible and doctrine. Hence the fundamental structural unity between Bible and theology is established by their consistent subject matter; the problem of disparate historical semantics between Bible and Trinity is solved conceptually by identity in the subject. Further, the structuring principle of God as final cause attributes to theology its scientific status as a practical discipline, aligned with the natural sciences by their justification in experience. All practical disciplines require the analytic method to study the discrete parts implied by and contained in the overarching unity for the discipline. In the case of theology, the use of philosophical tools, particularly logic and dialectic, is oriented theologically toward theology’s final cause.

The way in which the doctrine of God was intricately related to the Trinity in these systems demonstrates how theologians used reason to fit the explication of revelation’s content. Metaphysical understanding of God, primarily causality, and metaphysical attributes, for example unity and infinity, were discussed first under the doctrine of God. These metaphysical determinations were then explicitly connected in the subsequent section on the Trinity to the divine essence constituting the Trinity. Furthermore, the works of God, primarily creation and providence, were located after an explication of the Trinity. By this systematic link theologians showed that the works reveal the unity of the essence that is itself constituted by the three persons. In this way, the divine essence was not divorced from the Trinity, and the three persons were
theology is often viewed as the "anti-intellectual" antidote or alternative to the rationalist systems of Protestant orthodoxy. This misconception is slowly being revised as scholarship takes note of the deep connections between Pietism and the Enlightenment's focus on individuality. If the Enlightenment is synonymous with the development of modern subjectivity, then Pietism must be said to contribute in a significant way toward understanding the person, both human and divine.

Subjectivity is the hallmark of Western modernity, and its primary distinguishing characteristic is individualism. Pietism's employment of the Bible's metaphor of the heart appropriated (as it contributed to the development of) this crucial dimension of modern Western culture for Christianity. Pietist theologians, from the earlier Johann Arndt to the later "father" of Pietism, Philipp Jakob Spener, took the cultivation of a true and living personal Christian faith as an essential component of the reform of Christian communities. Deeper Christian commitment follows the transformation of the individual by his or her personal relationship with Christ, a relationship cultivated through personal piety and education. Within Pietism, the motto of the Reformation, sola scriptura, was understood as endorsement of the capacity of persons to discover biblical truths, from this came the practice of Losungsn, biblical passages selected at random and interpreted to speak God's will directly into the personal circumstances of individual lives. The cultivated Pietist heart was to be transformed in this way by immediate contact with the subject matter of scripture. Personal engagement with the scriptures was experience with the text's res, that is, God and the divine will. The Trinity would be framed from this experiential perspective.

Modern notions of subjectivity rely on the distinction between inner and outer, which is likewise the key distinction in the modern historicist paradigm: in this latter instance between the outer change of history and its inner metaphysical constancy. This is Lessing's "ugly ditch" between the historical and the rational. Immanuel Kant's work arises in the context of Pietism that opened up the historical as the realm of religious experience. This problem facing Pietism and later taken up by Kant is the problem of the historical as related to the principle of unity or self-sameness through time, which is the realm of the speculative. How do you relate the historical to the speculative?

The way Pietism responded to this challenge was to follow Luther's sacramental understanding that the outer conveys the inner, the word, however limited, conveys the thing. The philosophical problem of Lessing's "ugly ditch" becomes less of an issue for Christian theology in its Pietist expression, which saw the inner core of subjectivity tied closely

Leibniz definitively moved Protestant orthodoxy's commitment to system to its academic apex. A recent excellent work by Maria Rosa Antognazza discusses Leibniz, a lifelong Lutheran, and his work on the Trinity, which was articulated from a systematic perspective. The methodological distinction between explanation and comprehension gave Leibniz the theological room he needed to investigate the trinitarian mystery, freeing him to explain the meanings of terms that in and of themselves were ambiguous. His writings were often occasioned by numerous dialogues with advocates of unitarian or non-trinitarian understandings of God, and they demonstrated his adaptation of philosophical reason to explain the Trinity theologically. His responses took the form of clarifying the connection of a metaphysical distinction between divine intellect and will to the three persons as they were commonly acknowledged by the psychological trinitarian model from the church Fathers: as power, wisdom, and love. When his nephew Friedrich Löfler attempted to deduce the Trinity according to a strict geometrical model, Leibniz reworked the model to account for the revealed truths of scripture as they were interpreted by church teaching. Leibniz held together Bible and trinitarian tradition by contextualizing both in a system that adjusted reason in view of revelation and used the Trinity to integrate historical elements into the system.

The trinitarian story so far shows how Protestant orthodoxy systems carefully connected historical and revealed elements with metaphysical claims in order to explain, not comprehend, the Trinity. Later theological development, particularly beginning with Schleiermacher, sought to distinguish between historical and rationalist claims, thereby limiting the extent to which metaphysical reason could be adapted for theology.

I treat Pietism in the next section to show how the use of critical reason opened the possibility for understanding the Trinity in history.

**Trinity and history in Pietism**

The history of the doctrine of the Trinity that I am developing here necessarily includes Pietism, the ecumenical Christian movement that transgressed confessional boundaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Pietism's aim was to establish Christianity as a transformation of the heart, and to this end it incorporated mystical and devotional strands from the Reformation as well as classic texts from Christian history in order to precipitate the "warming of the heart" felt by Christians experiencing the immediacy of a living relationship with Christ. Yet its
to its outer appearances. This is so for human and divine subjectivity: the inner core of subjectivity is accessed by outer “works” or functions. One result of this scheme is that the outer is privileged as a legitimate and necessary area of study. Pietism’s great contribution to modern reason is that the experience of redemption opens up the historical as the subject of intellectual study. The encounter with Jesus is constitutive of Pietist interiority, and the outpouring of the Spirit is responsible for historical transformations; and so the study of church history, scripture, and ancient devotional and mystical texts becomes a vehicle for understanding the way of God in history. Historical criticism was launched by Pietism, beginning with Johann Albrecht Bengel’s critical edition of the New Testament (1734) and his influential Gnomon Novi Testamenti (Exegetical Annotations of the New Testament) of 1742. Pietism thus contributed to the appreciation of Christianity as a historical religion, for the application of historical methods to Christian truth (although these methods were devised with “historical” as a theological term relating to experience as transformative encounter, whereas history in positivist terms would subtract the human component and turn history into a study of the past).

Yet the terms of “system” require bringing unity to historical change. Pietism’s own speculative tendency has had implications for creative trinitarian thinking. The preoccupation with history as the realm of divine agency, available to individual access, frees the “inner” from “outer” biblical and doctrinal constraints and opens it to mystical and visionary experience. Count Nicolas von Zinzendorf had a Jesus-centered piety that did not detract from a “doctrinal novelty” to see the Spirit as Mother, thereby implying a marital relation between Father and Spirit. Two later figures, Jakob Boehme and Friedrich Christof Oetinger, moved even further in speculation, both preceding and influencing the early nineteenth-century thought of G. W. F. Hegel and F. W. J. von Schelling. Boehme moved speculation in the controversial direction of theogonic narrative. Oetinger, like Bengel, a Pietist from Swabia in southwest Germany, was on a lifelong quest for truth of the Bible that led in a speculative direction integrating kabbala with Trinity. Such visionary strands emerged from Pietism, a broad idiom that moves between tempering speculation by rooting it in scripture on the one hand, and a speculative creativity not stymied by fixation on correct orthodox formulation on the other.

Post-Reformation Pietism and Protestant orthodoxy contributed to the fundamental shaping of speculation and history in particular relationship, with implications for the Trinity. Protestant orthodoxy oriented Bible, metaphysics, and theology to the trinitarian res, and articulated these relations by system. Pietism, oriented by the question of subjectivity, led to a preoccupation with history, developed by parameters of critical reason that limited speculative doctrines of the Trinity, but also opened up creative visions by virtue of individual inspiration without doctrinal constraint. Western reason subsequently, down to the present, would be experimenting with system and science, history and critical reason, so that the history of trinitarian reflection is a history of the articulation of a mystery that opens up possibilities of language and thinking, in distinct cultural and philosophical forms.

SPECMATION AND HISTORY IN POST-KANTIAN SYSTEMS

In post-Kantian systems, the trinitarian question, problematized by the question of the relation of language to reality, is extended into the quest for system-building. This was in explicit engagement with emerging historical consciousness, in terms of psychological individuality, national consciousness, and world history. History in this post-Kantian context emerged as the new metaphysics; any system now was held to the requirement of conceptualizing the reality of historical change in relation to speculative factors determining the constancy of agency in history, whether human, political, or divine.

The two major exemplars of the modern system are Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher, who dominate the ways in which modern philosophical and theological thought are conceived as system. It is customary to see the two in conflict, and indeed they were hostile colleagues at the University of Berlin. They represent two different ways of constructing a system as the integration of speculation and history by assigning to the Trinity both metaphysical and epistemological functions.

Hegel’s speculative trinitarian thought

Post-Kantian system sought to bring together the two realms of nature and spirit, two metaphysically distinct realms (in Kant’s formulation), one determined by the laws of natural causality, the other by the laws of freedom. The post-Kantians were looking for a system to integrate one with the other, for a metaphysical system that would unite them while still accounting for their difference. This quest for systematic integration in German Idealism and its outcomes had the greatest repercussions for understanding the Trinity.
Leibniz helped in this context by proposing his solution of the metaphysic of power and appearance, with power providing the underlying unity of distinct appearances of a res in time. This metaphysic functioned for Hegel [as it did for Schleiermacher too] as the means of integrating the system of thought [Idealism or the concept] with the system of being [Realism or history]. Unity, for Hegel, is based on the assumption of an ontological point of indifference between both binary opposites, the point where nature is indifferent to freedom; by this assumption, the construction of system follows by reconstructing the route that the concept, or underlying unity, takes as it emerges into its opposite, the appearances, and as it returns to its origin. In Hegel’s understanding of Christianity as the religion that most adequately measures up to the systematic requirement of correspondence of thought and being [in Hegel’s terms, “the consummate religion”], the Trinity is seen as the primary ontological structure that can explain the reason for the concept’s necessary emergence into the history of appearances.

Hegel’s Trinity is constitutive of system. Two studies of Hegel’s Trinity, by Cyril O’Regan and Peter Hodgson, agree in this regard, particularly with respect to Hegel’s speculative philosophy, which transposes temporal representation into the speculative concept. By this move, the speculative concept, which is the metaphysical power underlying all reality, integrates history into a speculative narrative that is able to integrate time and infinity as reciprocally determining. Hegel accomplished this unity by appealing to his Lutheran orthodox theological commitment that the finite is capable of circumscribing the infinite (the motto finitum capax infiniti was one of the defining Lutheran theological issues in the late eighteenth century), most particularly in the incarnation, which united the two realms. History becomes constitutive of the eternal Trinity.

Hegel’s allusion to Joachim of Fiore, the thirteenth-century Calabrian abbot, is decisive here. Fiore’s trinitarian dispensationalism gave Hegel the conceptual tool to relate Trinity intimately to world history. The starting point in Hegel’s account of Trinity and history is the inchoate Trinity, or the un-self-differentiated Trinity, which Hegel correlates with the first trinitarian moment of the Father. The second moment, of the Son, extends the Trinity into history, under the rubric of creation and redemption. These trinitarian works are necessary to explicate the differentiating moment of Father and Son in the reality of history. The final moment of the Spirit is constituted by the Trinity’s full explication in the realm of reality, as that moment is integrated back into the divine life. The historically actual is returned to its eternal destination in Spirit.

The building of Hegel’s system required a conceptual vehicle that distinguished between the immanent and the economic Trinity. God’s relationship to the world is determined by the self-differentiation of God from the world, by the creation of the world. To use Hegelian logical categories, universality requires differentiation from particularity. Yet through this original self-differentiation, the Trinity emerges in redemption, a process that entails the differentiation of the Trinity into the moment of the Son. The return is subsumed under the rubric of Spirit, whereby the Spirit of love unites particularity with universality in order to reach the actuality of concrete universality or individuality. At the end of the process, individuality is assigned its distinct metaphysical status in the universal. Furthermore, at the end of the process, the explication of the Trinity as self-differentiated has become actual; by this, Hegel sees the economic Trinity’s manifestation as necessary to the process by which both God and world become actual through history. God becomes explicitly trinitarian through differentiation from and in relation to the world. The economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity as its inchoate presupposition and fully explicit goal.

The brilliance of Hegel’s systematic proposal is that trinitarian speculation is a legitimate tool of reason for comprehending God’s relation to the world. Yet Hegel’s speculation is decisively modern; it is justified by epistemology. The model of self-consciousness that serves the psychological basis for Hegel’s epistemology is in earnest continuity with the Augustinian tradition that sees the human mind as a trinitarian trace (vestigium Trinitatis). Although Hegel is more optimistic than Augustine about the epistemological power of the human mind to grasp the Trinity — Augustine’s De Trinitate [On the Trinity] should be read as a failure rather than as the success of mind to approach the Trinity — he is nonetheless indebted to this early Christian proposal. The transparency between human thinking and trinitarian processions of wisdom and love is a decisively Hegelian contribution to the Trinity. This contribution is achieved on the basis of the model of self-consciousness that Hegel adopts, in which appearance is transparent to its underlying unity. The human mind is capable of achieving speculative knowledge of its ground because it is caught up at the intersection of God’s work in creation. And this metaphysical relation justifies an epistemology that would declare the processions revelatory in both directions — in human and divine thinking. Whether transparency is called into
question on psychological grounds—as is the case with Schleiermacher—or on epistemological grounds—as is the case with critical reason—Hegel's powerful model succeeds in establishing the Trinity as system's cornerstone: in the human mind as it is part of the world, and in the explicit immanent Trinity, which includes the totality of history.

**Schleiermacher's historical trinitarian thought**

The Trinity is often regarded as a glaringly heterodox problem in Schleiermacher's system. Schleiermacher locates the doctrine at the conclusion of *The Christian Faith*, which then results in the criticism that the Trinity is not the central doctrinal factor of his theology. Yet the mere fact that it occurs at the end is no warrant for such a charge. Schleiermacher entertained the notion of relocating it at the beginning, as he wrote in his famous second letter to Friedrich Lücke. But this systematic reordering begs the important question that Schleiermacher poses in his *Christian Faith*, one that he answers by constructing an entire system culminating with the Trinity as a combination of historical expressions of Christianity.

The relation between language and *res* is the key determinant in Schleiermacher's thinking. He understood language as the "form" or "outer" that conveys the "inner" or meaning, which is always distinct yet always connected to outer form on a continuum. The distinct theological problem of language is posed on the philosophical self-consciousness modal of a continuum between thought and language, whereby thought is the inner constituting identity or unity of language that is necessarily linear on grammatical and syntactical principles. Schleiermacher's main theological concern for "outer" language is to preserve its link to its "inner" power. In Christian theological terms, the "inner" is the redemptive power emanating from Jesus, constant in the history of Christianity. Language evolves from its immediate biblical forms of poetry and rhetoric and becomes explicitly conceptual in theology. At all points along this continuum, the inner dimension of constancy must be traced back to Jesus' redeeming power. Theological language inevitably expresses this soteriological succession.

The soteriological focus exhibits Schleiermacher's Pietist and Kantian preoccupation with experience as well as his wariness of epistemologically unjustified claims of inner essences. Language appropriate to theology's subject matter must be derived from the historical experience of redemption, and hence any speculation that does not have an experiential connection is not permissible. Here Schleiermacher decisively rejects the commingling of metaphysical and historical claims, turning away from Leibniz and Hegel for confusing two sources of knowledge about God. The only claims made about self, world, and God are on experiential terms expressed in language. (Yet paradoxically, this insistence on history as the place of seeking the Trinity ends up in accusations that he has rejected orthodox trinitarianism!)

The issue of language has, as is characteristic of post-Reformation trinitarian thought, serious implications for the construal of the doctrine. Schleiermacher famously excludes the legitimacy of claiming the "eternal" distinctions in the concluding passages of *The Christian Faith*. This exclusion should not be read as a rejection of "trinitarian orthodoxy." Rather, it must be read in light of a theory of language that admits into theology only expressions derived from experience of Jesus of Nazareth. The linguistic issue is for Schleiermacher ultimately soteriological. If the Trinity is to be construed within such limits (a legitimate enterprise, to be sure, thus cleansing theological claims from non-experientially derived accretions), then only those statements can be used to construct an understanding of the Trinity. For Schleiermacher, any Old Testament passages used classically as warrants for the eternal distinctions must be rejected as well. He argues this dangerous biblical-theological claim on the soteriological grounds that any statements issued historically prior to the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee are, in his opinion, pre-Christian, and thereby inadmissible as expressions of redemption attributed to Jesus.

What this does to the Trinity is remarkable: Schleiermacher's own very detailed study of second- and third-century trinitarianism in the persons of Praxeas and Noetus demonstrates the care and concern he devotes to constructing a doctrine from soteriological statements. Critics have deemed this study to represent the Sabellian heresy. Although this charge is perhaps more accurately reflected in Schleiermacher's own admission of an alternative Sabellianism, which he proposes as an alternative to the classic Athanasian Trinity (meaning the *homoousios* doctrine), it must be interpreted in the conceptual light of Schleiermacher's overarching philosophical question of system and his theological commitment to soteriological utterances. If history is the realm of God-world experience, and if statements can be derived only from this realm of experience, then metaphysical speculation on eternal distinctions falls outside the bounds of critical theological reason on the grounds of both rationalist criticism and soteriological principles. Hence history for Schleiermacher becomes the defining metaphysic: reality is historical, and that reality as determined by God's causality is a historical reality.
At this point Schleiermacher appeals to Leibniz in order to justify these epistemological claims on metaphysical grounds. Appearance is the realm of history, what we can know about God's interaction with the world is derived from expressions of Christian self-consciousness. Power is the metaphysical unity of causality, which is, of course, Schleiermacher's concept of God as it is famously derived from the most immediate reflection in immediate self-consciousness on the "whence" of absolute dependence.

Knowledge of the Trinity is not metaphysically presupposed as the point of indifference at the beginning of the "narrative" in Hegelian terms, but is cumulative—the culmination of God's causality, experienced in the redemptive terms of Christ and the Spirit as the historical working-out of God's power in the world as wisdom and love. Hence Schleiermacher's Sabellianism is modified by his distinct appeal to Florentine periodicization to resolve the (modern) problem of history and speculation. Periodization is relevant only after the historical appearance of Jesus. Classic Sabellianism sees modes of God as interchangeable, whereas Schleiermacher sees Son and then Spirit as historically non-reducible to each other and, once introduced historically, as irrevocable constituents of the Trinity. By this restriction of trinitarian claims to the experience of redemption, the soteriological core of Christianity is preserved throughout its developing history. Finally for Schleiermacher, Christianity's history is the culmination of the Trinity's history in the world when all creation has been redeemed by the work of Christ and the Spirit.

Self-consciousness and history: Schleiermacher and Georg W. F. Hegel

Like Hegel, Schleiermacher constructs his trinitarian system on the psychological basis of self-consciousness. Unlike Hegel's, Schleiermacher's psychological model is one of immediate self-consciousness, meaning that the self-relation constituting individuality is never available as such in discursive thought. Immediate self-consciousness renders a discursive religion only as it is inevitably contextualized in a historical religion. As an unmediated self-relation sustaining the self's constancy through time, immediate self-consciousness never serves as source of a religious idea or action. It is linked to God as divine causality, yet the link is indirect, formed as a non-discursive inference in feeling from the denial of absolute freedom to the affirmation of absolute dependence. God as cause of all existence is related to immediate self-consciousness in the indirect terms of the feeling of a lack in immediate self-consciousness of its own ground. This designation of God is determined theologically as God is rendered historically in the Christian religion. Schleiermacher's modified Sabellianism results from a systematic conception of this specific psychological model in the historical terms of a divine causality that proceeds through wisdom and love with a decisive universal outreach. Yet Schleiermacher uses this psychological model to underline importantly the opacity of reality to reason on both sides; the limits of critical reason disallow speculation as to the "ground" because there is no immediate inference or access to it. The principle of revelation used by Hegel's transparent model of self-consciousness is blocked, leading to a Trinity that is much more hidden than revealed.

Speculation is restricted to the limits provided by the divine causality in redemptive history. Schleiermacher implies a very precise Trinitarian metaphysic and language by this restriction. Christian dogma is not about knowledge, nor even about the "knowledge of true doctrine," but rather about salvation that must be experienced before it is thought or acted. This restriction undercut rationalist principles, even the principle of revelation used to legitimate trinitarian orthodoxy, and opens the way for developing a trinitarian understanding that is tightly connected to God's loving work in creation. Schleiermacher accurately concludes his system with the Trinity as its culmination, the Trinity's revelation at the end of history. What is "lost" by Schleiermacher's conception is also an important matter of discussion. Perhaps new work needs to be done to understand precisely how metaphysics may make use of speculation on soteriological grounds, rather than rejecting it entirely.

Both Hegel and Schleiermacher offer paradigmatic ways of wrestling with system requirements with the discrepant attractions of history and speculation. Perhaps even more pressing in the nineteenth century than during the Enlightenment was the question of construing history as a metaphysical reality. The problem of identity and change required a model uniting both so that Lessing's "ugly ditch" could be crossed. Both Hegel and Schleiermacher conceptualized their respective systems by making powerful uses of the Trinity. Hegel situated the Trinity at the two end points of his "metanarrative" system; the Trinity was his system's ground and goal, and it historically traversed dispensations of Father, Son, and Spirit before culminating in a fully explicit immanent Trinity. Schleiermacher's system used the metaphysic of power/appearance to explain historical change through time, the Trinity was a culmination of faith statements expressing the redemptive effects of Jesus and of the Spirit in the church, and ultimately through
the church in the world. Both demonstrated how seriously the Trinity was to be taken in Western thought. The Trinity challenged Western thinking to conceive change as a function of a trinitarian metaphysic that could account for constancy through time. The Trinity was also challenged by Western thinking to explain history’s integration with speculation. The result was Trinity as system.

**THEOLOGICAL OUTCOME**

The history that I have developed in this chapter, which is an alternative to the received version, has centered on the integral place of the doctrine of the Trinity in the structures of Western thought and culture, during the three centuries following the sixteenth-century Reformation. In my account the Trinity, far from dealing a “death blow” to “rationality” (to quote Florensky again), decisively probed and stretched Western thinking by contributing to its development. As new paradigms arose in the post-Reformation period for scientific (wissenschaftlich) reasoning, Christian theology inevitably participated in the academic inquiry into truth and the search for knowledge. History and the natural world were opened up by the arts and sciences; inquiries into reason and rationality opened up the speculative dimensions of the world and its history. Christian theological development took hold of the academic idioms of its day. History and speculation became the two distinct areas of theological inquiry. The Trinity gradually emerged as the central defining doctrine for Christianity by the end of this epoch because its ultimate systematic conceptualization satisfied the dual idioms of history and speculation that had been established by academic consensus. The Trinity was not given this right by revelation. It earned this place by actively participating in the development of rationality. The story of how the Trinity achieved this result has been the preoccupation of this chapter.

The Christian theological outcome of this story in the twentieth century is what the “received” story has designated a “trinitarian renaissance.” Rather than being portrayed as a time when a trinitarian phoenix arose from the ashes of Enlightenment reason, the twentieth century and its fascination with the Trinity should be regarded as the product of Western reason’s three-hundred-year enterprise of absorbing, answering to, and bending around the challenges of cultural—philosophical history. The Trinity came to the twentieth century already in service as the systematic axiom of Hegel’s philosophical-theological system and the historical culmination of Schleiermacher’s dogmatic-theological system.

Its systematic privileging was the result of a development that had conceptualized the Trinity according to academic questions of history and speculation. Although Christian theology had always assented to the Trinity as a revealed truth, it seized as its task during the Enlightenment to explore doctrinal content in light of academic reason and conversely to present questions to reason on the basis of the Trinity in order to see new possibilities for thinking and action. From experience to system, from economic to immanent, the Trinity was conceived together with the parameters of modern thought. History and eternity were conceived together in Christian thought to bring system to trinitarian-theological completion. Rather than telling the death-knell of reason, the homoousios has inspired new ways to think the life of the triune God.

**Notes**

6. Ratschow’s study of the progenomena and part 1 of Protestant orthodox theological systems is an exceptional resource as it decisively corrects the structural and substantive errors of the authoritative anthologies of Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxies. Unfortunately Ratschow was unable to complete his study, leaving the investigation of all parts of the system following the doctrines of God and the Trinity to posterity. See Carl Heinz Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung*, 2 vols. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohr, 1964, 1968).
7. Ibid., 3, 35.
8. Ibid.
10. Antognazza describes these discussions with exceptional detail in ibid., 16–33, 120–60.

11. Ibid., 167.


13. See the learned research of Johannes Wallman, most recently collected in his Pietismus-Studien [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008].


15. See Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, Die Lehrtafel der Prinzessin Antonia, ed. Reinhard Bremayer and Friedrich Hausserman [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997].


20. Ibid., §16.

21. Ibid., §177.

22. Ibid., §170.3.

