Prayer, Particularity, and the Subject of Divine Personhood

Who Are Brümmer and Barth Invoking When They Pray?

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Introduction

The title “Trinitarian Theology after Barth” is a deceptively simple one. With the reference to trinitarian theology it appears to have learned from Barth that the doctrine of the Trinity is no mere dogmatic addendum, merely another thing confessed. Instead, it is, in some way or another, regulative of what counts as Christian. Of course, all Christian doctrines overlap and interpenetrate one another, but as doctrines they have their *raison d'être* in the confession of God. However, a claim by Daniel Migliore that “Rightly understood, the doctrine of the Trinity is not an arcane, speculative doctrine” implies that something terribly wrong has occurred in theological reflection.1 Problematic is not only the modern feeling that the doctrine of the Trinity is “esoteric and speculative,” but also the separation between the doctrine and Christian practice. Consequently, Migliore feels compelled to counter by arguing that “the route that we take and the conclusions that we reach in the doctrine of God will profoundly influence everything else that we say about Christian faith and life.”2

2. Ibid., 56.
Migliore's worries echo Karl Rahner's celebrated complaints made a few decades earlier. Whatever the merits and demerits of Rahner's claim as an historical observation on Western theologies—and significant work challenges the connections between Augustinian trinitarianism and individualism, hierarchicalism, and so on, connections largely dependent upon Théodore de Régnon's now-classic thesis—the theological claims remain significant.3 There are two such broad arguments here: firstly, the positive one that the doctrine of the Trinity has theologically regulative significance for everything Christian; and the negative one, that in practice it does not have the force it should have.4 Not only do many critiques of the doctrine fail to understand the doctrine as itself theological reflection on early Christian doxologies and thus practices of worship, but also disregard that it in turn came to be the lens through which worship was offered by expressing who the One worshipped is.5

But what does “after Barth” mean? It can be taken in a chronological sense that has theological significance for the regulation of trinitarian theology, a trinitarian theology that has learned to ask who God is in some manner through Barth's trinitarian reflections. On the other hand, there is a chronological sense that refuses to do its trinitarian theology through him. Worries about whether Barth has truly engaged with the pluralism, or the very trinitarianness, of God in his account of the Trinity could understand the “after Barth” as a way of returning

3. Régnon, Études de théologie positive sur la sainte Trinité. Régnon's now highly contested study "discovered" the distinction between Western and Eastern theological tendencies: the Latins proceeded from general nature to concrete person, thereby prioritising divine unity; and the Greeks proceeded from person to nature, so emphasising the plurality of divine persons.

4. On the latter, see Jüngel, “Trinitarian Prayers,” 244.

5. Soskice, “Trinity and Feminism,” 136: “The doctrine is best seen not as an additional conviction, but rather as providing the frame in which central convictions rest.” But here is a tension, one often associated with George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic account of doctrine. Is the doctrine of the Trinity not also an additional conviction, even if not merely or perhaps even primarily so? After all, the doctrine aims to say something about God, however fragility, in order to express what is most appropriate regarding the question “who is to be worshipped?” While this is not to suggest that the doctrine is explanatory, it does belong to a kind of “realism” that refuses to reduce God to human self-description (which is not to say that the grammatical account of doctrine does, but it perhaps does not make clear where “God” does not become reduced to linguistic-rules).
threefold difference to theology over against Barth’s perceived indulgence in singularising divine subjectivity.

Even so, it is important not to reduce the plurality of accounts of “Trinitarian Theology after Barth.” This book’s title, then, cannot demand anything less than an attentiveness to, and honesty in assessing, a whole host of complex issues.

Mentioning honesty here leads conveniently to the theme of prayer, since, as Rowan Williams indicates, prayer is significant “for an honest theology.” Barth’s own claims in this regard in his Evangelical Theology lectures emerges from earlier arguments such as that which ties prayer and obedience: “The prayer of the Christian to God is the basic act of the obedience engendered in faith.” Prayer is offered to God and, given that the doctrine of the Trinity is irreducibly the measure of what counts as the Christian confession of God, it is intimately connected to the triunity of God’s being God. Taking seriously the critical observations of Rahner and Migliore demands that there be ways in which a theological account of prayer necessitates a theological engagement that pre-eminently involves reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity.

When discussing the early modern intellectual context Amos Funkenstein identifies “changes of connotation that some divine attributes underwent in a new intellectual climate.” The changes were so materially significant, and thus not sealed in some innocuous sphere called “apologetics” as several who criticize Barth on “natural theology” imagine, that he feels compelled to critically exclaim, “How much more deadly to theology were such helpers than its enemies!” Vincent Brümmer’s well-known account of prayer, it will be suggested, is an instance not so much of prayer shaped by a trinitarian account of divine self-identification but of a theistic tradition that is at best tangentially comprehensible within a trinitarian dogmatic framework, but at worst essentially disfiguring of it in important ways.

The paper will not attend to thematically genetic issues with reference to Brümmer, nor test the genealogy of the changes suggested by

7. CD III/3, 283.
9. Ibid., 8. LaCugna somewhat trivialises the differences in “Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity,” 169, 171.
10. Brümmer, What Are We Doing When We Pray?
Funkenstein or others, but rather begin to propose very broadly a non-departicularizing theological description of prayer developed largely through a critical reading of What Are We Doing When We Pray? and Barth's doctrine of the Trinity in CD I/1.\footnote{My focus will not be on Barth's texts that explicitly theologically address prayer, but rather on something broader, the trinitarian ethos of his dogmatics developing in the early 1930s.}

**Generality, Abstraction, and the Theistic What Is “Prayer”?**

Words take their meaning from the company they keep and the differences they then perform from the other words in these contexts. While this is particularly clear with homonyms, it is true of all other words as well. Consequently, we need to see what words are doing in any given linguistic situation, and in observing this it becomes clear that language-use is a skill that involves intensive training within communities of linguistically communicative agents. What kind of “company” does talk of “prayer” keep, and in particular that of Brümmer’s account?

His book title initially suggests the importance of reflection on concrete practices or performative contexts through making a connection between prayer and acts of praying. But it is immediately apparent that he never defines the “we” in his study’s focus. Without careful attention to the demands of this particularizing matter there will come, largely by default even if not by design, an assumption that the “we” refers to all those who pray. This again raises the question of what is meant by “prayer,” and so we come full circle—we need to have some sense of what prayer is in order to ask what we are doing when we pray; but in order to have this sense attention must be paid to concrete practices of people who do pray. One way out of the difficulty is to start from what so-called “religious communities” call “prayer” and reflect philosophically upon that. According to D. Z. Phillips, “to understand what prayer is one must refer to the religious community from which prayer derives its intelligibility.”\footnote{Phillips, *Concept of Prayer*, 36.}

On one level it could be argued that one does not have to begin by claiming some knowledge of what prayer is; but merely commence by observing practices that various religious groups name “prayer.” So
William Swatos argues, “People pray, and that is all a sociologist needs to know to begin work.” Nevertheless, on another level, this strategy finds it difficult to avoid imposing just such a pre-understanding. After all, what counts as similarity and difference in the practices and with what assumptions do we measure and evaluate these? How can we evaluate talk of Christian life as, and thus not merely involving, prayer? What can we do with Bruce Marshall’s observation that “the Christian community presents us with a confusing welter of beliefs and practices”? Simply, what counts as “prayer”?

Recently there have been studies attempting to test “the efficacy of prayer” that have set groups of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others certain tasks the results of which could generate empirically measurable data. The assumption is that all these groups are doing something essentially the same, and further that their various “prayer” practices can be formulated with a scientifically measurable outcome. Is this an example of a thorough and careful attentiveness to different practices that, in the end, turn out to be doing the same thing, or an imposed singular categorization? Understood in the former fashion, the study of prayer would begin by describing the multiplicity of practices in order to seek similarities that would enable ways of continuing to talk of the diversity under the umbrella term “prayer.”

It is noticeable that Brümmer largely fails to consider these difficulties and consequently follows a common but nonetheless cavalier attitude to particularity, tending to lapse into a substantial, and thus not innocuous, mistake of abstracting prayer talk from concrete practices.

Clearly prayer as human performance can be studied by a plethora of human and social studies: in particular, psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies, religious studies, and so on. Even the natural sciences have more recently attempted to get in on the act. Nevertheless, what Christians at least, for all their differences, think they are doing when they pray is something that cannot be reduced without remainder to these disciplines of the phenomenal. What I mean by this is hinted at by Miroslav Volf when he argues that “beliefs are already

15. See Poloma and Gallup, Varieties of Prayer, 8–9; Gallup and Jones, One Hundred Questions and Answers, 36; Byrd, “Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer,” 826–29; Benson, Beyond the Relaxation Response, 146.
entailed in practices." Yet it is equally the case that belief can affect and effect practice. According to L. Gregory Jones, speaking particularly about Christian initiation, practice is bound up with not only action but desire and belief in a complex and dynamic interchange.

The implication, beyond any naive and habitual bifurcation of beliefs and practices familiar in modernity, is that differences in practice of "prayer" so-called have to do in significant ways with differences in belief, in how pray-ers understand what they are doing, and particularly how they understand the one prayed to. As Phillips recognizes, "One only has to compare accounts of religious experience to appreciate how diverse they are, and how different are the conceptions of God which underlie them."

To return to Brümmer's account, there seems to be more going on with his study than simple inattentiveness to difference and particularity, or the strategy working remoto christo, as Anselm might say, for a non-Christian audience. He assumes that prayer is offered to God, and yet no attempt is made to demonstrate the difficulty of using this theological term. Consequently, among other things, he masks the sense of different, and often incompatible, practices of usage. Michael Buckley's study is particularly suggestive for understanding what is happening here theologically. Modern thinking developed in directions where it disabled the particularity of theological regulation so that "more specifically the person and teaching of Jesus or the experience and history of the Christian Church, did not enter the discussion." Brümmer appears caught in a web of theistic signification that abstracts "God" from the operations of the triune economy, and thus confuses God with something else. Not only is this a mistake from a theological perspective, it distorts what is meant by Christian life and practice, mistakenly assuming it is little more than an instance or expression of something more basic and common, what the early British deists called "natural religion."

20. There is a further crucial abstraction in Brümmer's study. For it prayer is something we do rather than that into which we are drawn, particularly as it is performed
One Person, Many Persons? Adding Up the Personality Disorder

Brümmer promisingly argues that "It would be a category mistake to interpret the believer's claim that God answers prayer as an experimental hypothesis." The promise lies in the distinction between prayer and observable natural phenomena, the latter being "governed by causal necessity," and the former being related to Personal agency which is always the result of the agent's free choice between alternative courses of action. Since prayer involves personal agencies that entails, among other things, that prayer and its effects cannot be observed in any simply measurable sense. Equally promising, and consequent to this, is Brümmer's refusal to equate prayer with manipulatibility. Machines, being "governed by causal necessity," "can be manipulated." In contrast, persons can be persuaded but their "decision to act remains up to" them.

Yet the logic of his claims here is not entirely sound, and one must consider a distinct limitation in the analogy of persons as it is employed without further qualification—persons can indeed be manipulated. It takes little reflection on the work of ideology critics, among many others, to realize that persons are not indeterministically placed, existentially "footloose and fancy free," despite the more indeterminist accounts of the human person that have characterized modern ethical and epistemological constructivisms. Whether they should be manipulated is a question on a different level. Brümmer's account broadly could be supported by, among other things, a strategic claim that persons are ontologically non-manipulable since the truth of their being is in their relation with God. This, though, would be still a form of determination since it involves an ontic receptivity or dependence upon God, and that is not an option Brümmer, with his more indeterminist sensibility, seems able to suggest.

One might respond further by saying that God is not a human person and therefore not manipulable in the way human persons are. Yet

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21. Brümmer, "What Are We Doing When We Pray?" 2.
22. Ibid., 5.
23. Ibid., 6.
this would be to admit that the concept of persons be limited in its appropriate attribution to God. Brümmer, it would seem, is deploying the analogy of persons in some less than analogical ways. Of course he, with a personalist version of what Peter Geach calls “two-way contingency,” properly distinguishes persons and machines, and the biblical imagery of divine personhood draws theology closer to analogies of persons-in-conversation than active agents acting on machinery or even the impersonal operations of fate. But there is a danger in overplaying the analogy and thus of subverting the difficulty of explicating divine personhood by categories fitted for the universe. Take the notion of prayer as “conversation.” What is happening here? In conversation, the personal disposition of the conversants toward one another is determinative for both the shape and the results of the conversation. Brümmer sees something of this in prayer, and even argues that “sincere or wholehearted” requests do prayers’ “efficacy” offered “to a personal God.” This is a suggestive assertion, which might all seem well and good since one's disposition generally determines what one is doing, and the shape of its consequences are largely dependent upon that. Moreover, the claim in some sense can resist the reduction of prayer to emergency situations, a kind of last resort measure that, intended or not, renders “God” something to be used for our own ends. Much prayer (prayer for loved ones who are ill, national days of prayer during periods of national crisis, and so on) does take the form of something like conjuration. This, according to Rahner, signals the human’s attempt “to subject God to himself.” Brümmer’s concept of divine “personal-ness,” then, seems to deny the reduction of God to the object of manipulative requests, and his conception of prayer as conversation can remind us that the “personal” God is not an object of our demanding.

What happens then to prayers of impetration? A conversational approach implies at least that prayer is much more than petition. So Peter Baelz argues that “Prayer is more than asking God to give us this or that.” Asking, here, becomes one aspect of a more “rounded” sense of the activity of prayer, and in this way is less in danger of reducing God

24. Geach, God and the Soul, 89; cf. Brümmer, What Are We Doing When We Pray? 30.
25. Brümmer, What Are We Doing When We Pray? 7.
to the objectified provider of our needs. Prayer has to do with personal relations, and thereby prayer as thanksgiving, confession, contemplation, and so on needs to be emphasized.

Nevertheless, the question remains whether these dialogical terms appropriately prevent the drawing of “God,” and talk of God’s personhood and agency, into the most unsophisticated anthropomorphism: “He is a person and therefore free in what he does.”28 Here are all kinds of questions one might want to put to Brümmer with regards to his connecting of prayer, efficacy, and faith. For now it is important to see the kind of “onto-theology” that undergirds his presentation. The problem lies partly in the way the prayerful asking to God is construed, but even more fundamentally in terms of the way God as conversant is conceived. Unless the analogy of persons in conversation is developed with considerably more hesitancy, recalling the partiality in the function of any and all metaphors and analogies, what we find driving the notion of prayer as “conversation,” at least in Brümmer’s sense, is a certain understanding of persons and of the I-Thou relation of two “others”29 (Baelz’s preferred term “communion” may have other, and more satisfactory, connotations).30

His account echoes post-Enlightenment accounts of the self in which relations are free relatings of undetermined agents or persons. This is the reason why he categorically rejects Thomas’s considerably more careful and suggestive account of “double agency” for describing divine-human relations, castigating it as ultimately a deterministic conception of the universe that renders human freedom and independence superfluous, and that thereby raises the specter of passive resignation to the way things are. Brümmer’s opposition to such renderings of the God-human relation is largely the product of a theology that is locked into compatibilist moves of likening prayer to the kind of bipolar exchange involved in conversation (“God does what he is asked because he is asked.”),31 therein also raising the specter of divine capriciousness: “if

28. Brümmer, What Are We Doing When We Pray? 53.
29. Stump, “Petitionary Prayer,” 582, for instance, speaks of prayer in terms of a protective “buffer” against two vastly unequal “persons.”
31. Brümmer, What Are We Doing When We Pray? 33. The divine-human relationship becomes inverted with God responding in some way or another (either by granting, or refusing to grant) to the pray-er’s requests, and thus placing the initiative with the pray-er. Certainly one way of mitigating the force of that is to understand prayer
he is to be acknowledged as a person, there is nothing automatic about what he does, and we should not *presume upon* him."\(^{32}\) Consequently, it is revealing to hear him claim that his critical distinction "does not imply that they [viz., prayers] cannot be tested at all."\(^{33}\) The effect of the personal disposition of the pray-er "does increase the probability [of the success of prayer requests] in a way that could be shown statistically. One could inquire, therefore, whether devout prayers to a personal God would not increase the chances of the events prayed for in a statistically significant way."\(^{34}\) Even if he does come to claim the difficulty of statistically measuring under experimental conditions the efficacy of prayer, Brümmer feels that the nature of the connection between prayer/prayerer/efficacy is such that there may well be just such "evidence." This is quite an admission and indicates that his account does not sufficiently theologically challenge the evidentialist reduction, we might say with Jean-Luc Marion, of "God into being" or, with Thomas Aquinas, into a genus. In this he is far from alone among philosophers. As David Burrell observes, "the endemic tendency of philosophers treating divinity is to assign God a place in the universe, albeit the largest or the first or the most significant."\(^{35}\) While he does acknowledge that God is not a cause like other causes, Brümmer’s God is too neatly construed as an agent in a world of agents, even if his privileging of the personal metaphors in God-talk subvert some of the more unpalatable consequences of talk of God in terms of being an impersonal cause in a world of causes.

This entails that the trinitarian theological problem lies deeper than simply the matter of the number of persons, as happens in the kind of social trinitarian account offered by Richard Swinburne, among others. A conceptuality of the “I-Thou” retains the sense of independent subjects *over and against each other* no more than the thought of one I and three Thous. In fact, in an earlier article Swinburne unashamedly argues that the doctrine of the Trinity has to do with three individuals, as divine gift and invitation. Yet God remains responsive here, and the conversation is momentary. Moreover, we have to ask just how far "prayer" is conversation when its heart is *petition*, asking. What meaning would the term "conversation" have if one of the conversants was continually asking for things of the other?

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32. Ibid., 54.
33. Ibid., 7.
34. Ibid.
three “gods” in fact. 36 Aside from the obvious tritheism and the question over what the doctrine of the Trinity was doing with the, in its Latin form, *una substantia*, the point that Sarah Coakley’s incisive critique makes of Swinburne is that this doctrine of God is modeled on the basis of “three Cartesian ‘individuals’” theologically projected. 37 Of course, “even if projection always [to some degree or another] has a role to play in theology,” Karen Kilby observes, “it is here playing a distinctive, and distinctively problematic one.” 38 The social trinitarians like Swinburne, and even Moltmann, want to say some very precise things about God, and the character of these things prompts Kilby to argue, “much of the detail . . . [appears to be] derived either from the individual author’s or the larger society’s latest ideals of how human beings should live in community.” 39

What resources do theologies of “prayer as conversation” have to prevent one “from mistaking the image for God, from thinking of God as subject to the limitations of our imagery”? 40 Conversation requires two linguistic subjects who share a linguistic context, and manifestly God does not share such a context with God’s creatures, and thus talk of God’s speech, Word, and revelation should be handled in appropriate ways. This is in tension with a theological perspective that insists that “God,” as von Balthasar declares, “is not a Thou in this sense of being simply another I,” an object, even if that be the objectivity of a rational subject who stands over against us and can encounter us as an other. 41 Instead, God is, von Balthasar argues, “the profoundest mystery within our own being,” even as God remains distinguishable from us so that the immanence of this being “within” is not to be construed “as so interior to us that we confuse it with our own being, with a natural wisdom

37. Coakley, “Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity,” 128. Understanding the doctrine of the Trinity as being essentially about numbers has been a thought plaguing modern critical treatments of it, from John Hick’s application of the image of the square-circle to James P. Mackey’s charge that it is “at worst, an intellectual conundrum comprising some strange celestial mathematics” (Christian Experience of God as Trinity, 3).
39. Ibid., 441.
40. McCabe, God Still Matters, 27. Cf. Phillips, Concept of Prayer, 50; Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1:127. However, see McIntyre, Theology after the Storm, 198, 205.
given us once and for all, and ours to use as we will.”\(^{42}\) That entails that “we cannot hold conversation with God,” although when used with proper caution the conversational metaphor may well remain useful.\(^{43}\)

This dogmatic context is not even considered by Brümmer. His “God” is abstracted from the economy of God’s graceful performance with God’s creatures. The problem is not so much one of semantics and method used, as if his account would be more satisfactory if only he spoke of the triune God and not “God” simpliciter, or if he reflected more on the biblical account of prayer than provide abstract, sounding philosophical reflections on practices of prayer. The problem irreducibly is that of a substantial or material abstraction.

At the very least, a “conversational” model for prayer is distinctly limited. After all, language of “conversation” may be too bland. As Barth observes, to clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world. In a modest approval of the controversial metaphor, then, Barth declares that “In the first three petitions [of the Lord’s Prayer] our prayer is a sort of conversation with the heavenly. It is like a sigh.”\(^ {44}\) At its best, “conversation” remains a metaphor needing to be supplemented, especially with a sense of ethical urgency. At its worst, however, it is distracting and even theologically inappropriate. Put starkly, Bümmer has, in the words of Lash on modern “theisms,” “lost sight of the difficulty of speaking of God.”\(^ {45}\) Likewise he has lost sight of the difficulty of speaking to God.\(^ {46}\)

Less Object-ion to the Pluriformity of the Divine Subjectivity

Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity as developed in CD I/1 would not seem to be particularly promising for generating theological proposals for redirecting theologies of prayer. Barth is well known at this point in his oeuvre for rejecting the appropriateness of discourse of personhood in

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 11f.

\(^{44}\) Barth, Prayer, 43, my emphasis.

\(^{45}\) Lash, “Considering the Trinity,” 190.

\(^{46}\) Among other things, conversation can suggest linguistic fluency of invocatory address, whereas being before God has more to do with confession, purgation and transformation, with “being-in-becoming.”
relation to the threefoldness of God's being God. In response, the term “person” is given its place as an indication of the personality of God, while the divine differentiations are controversially renamed “modes.” Critics suggest that in responding to modern anthropological atomization Barth unwittingly assumes and repeats it, only now drawing it into the very discourse about the being of God. In this respect, the use of the phrase “three modes of being” is the least of the worries in many ways, and only the most superficial readings attribute Sabellianism to this when it is quite clear, as we will see below, that the language functions not to make the divine pluriformity something successive, and therefore limited to the economy, but simultaneous. The difficulty is deeper, it is commonly suggested. Consequently, it would appear that any thought of developing a trinitarian theology of prayer “after Barth” would need to reject his account of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Briefly to return to Brümmer, his problem was not so much the one of numbers, of having only one, as much as the kind of one he assumed that could be spoken of without hesitation as “God.” As Barth claims, what is important is “not any knowledge of any unity of any God,” but of the unity appropriate to God. Brümmer’s “one” is an objectification of God largely through projecting post-Enlightenment understandings of persons as selves. Even if he does resist some of the more fashionable immanentist moves that isolate or atomize selfhood, and does so by conceiving of a relation with God as Self, Brümmer’s way of doing this amounts to a slightly different but nonetheless real reductionist immanence—God as categorically present to human understanding as being “person” and thus distinctively like items in the intramundane.

Barth too uses discourse of personhood of God and even frequently employs the category of I-Thou relations, in relation to “the divine I which confronts man in this [revelatory] act in which it says Thou to him.” In fact, God, Barth declares of the act of prayer itself,

47. *CD* I/1, 355–59. This is somewhat different to his earlier use. Cf. Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 100.
49. For example, LaCugna’s, *God for Us*, 252, is a simplistic reading.
50. *CD* I/1, 353.
51. Ibid., 304.
is addressed as “Thou.” Nevertheless, what Barth is doing here is quite different from Bümmer in certain significant theological ways. In order to explore this claim there are a considerable number of observations that need to be made, and the following discussion therefore will be an involved and lengthy one.

It is worth beginning with unpacking the significance of the theological architectonic that develops the doctrine of the Trinity in dogmatic prolegomena. This, of course, was a bold and radical move in its time, which provokes Barth to admit that “we are adopting a very isolated position from the standpoint of dogmatic history.” The opening of the Church Dogmatics with prolegomena, Barth maintains, is something of a concession to modernity, but nonetheless it is one that calls significant conceptual features of familiar strands of modernity into question. For instance, Barth rejects beginning-from-first-principles, and instead begins-within-the-midst. Moreover, his move is not one of epistemic construction but of discovery. Thus Barth’s work here is critical, suspicious of certain modern epistemic categories, among other things, and transformative of them.

But transformative of what in particular? Critics like Richard H. Roberts often laud his “redirection of theological interest to the doctrine of the Trinity” so that God is distinguished from the theistic One as the living Father, Son, and Spirit. Equally extolled is his claim concerning the doctrine’s regulative significance. But Barth, they argue, is inconsistent in claiming to be responsive to revelation since he imposes modern categories on revelation. He, this account continues, reduces the doctrine of the Trinity to the grammatical logic of revelation discourse. So Moltmann, for example, asserts that “Barth developed the doctrine of the Trinity out of the logic of the concept of God’s self-revelation.”

Roberts and those who follow him, as well as Moltmann and Pannenberg independently and earlier, claim that Barth is directed by “the unfolding of a certain obscure metaphysics.” This, Roberts claims,

52. Ibid., 316.
53. Ibid., 300.
55. So, e.g., Volf, “Theology for a Way of Life,” 6; and Grenz, Rediscovering the Triune God, 51.
56. Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 140.
57. Kerr, Christ, History, and Apocalyptic, 89. Kerr, however, fails to explore his
is the metaphysics of German idealism. It is Barth’s residual idealism that forces him to provide an account of eternity that generates a christologically constrained conception of time that in turn renders revelation somewhat isolated from the contingencies of history, and reduces the expressiveness of the Trinity to the singularity of the temporally compressive “single act” of revelation. 58

Roberts’ suggestions are subtle and too involved for anything less than brief considerations here. Nonetheless, one possible response to them observes that Barth at least claims to work in an a posteriori manner, exploring and explicating the dogmatic implications of the biblical witness. 59 He speaks emphatically of God’s revelation as the “Lord” being the ground, foundation, or root of the doctrine of the Trinity, and thus of “a genuine finding” from the Scriptures. By this he does not mean revelation taken in some grammatico-logical sense, but that which is encountered through the scriptural witness. This is clear not only from statements he makes concerning the connection of the doctrine and biblical exposition, “for to abandon exposition would be to abandon the text too,” but from his small-print practice of biblical commentary. 60 In fact, it is only after several reflections or “commentary” on biblical texts that Barth unpacks revelation as “the self-unveiling of God.” 61

This is a useful but conceptually superficial response to Roberts since it does not address the assumption that certain idealist conceptions determine Barth’s reading of the biblical witness. The deliberatively chosen language of “subjectivity” and the divine “I” does indeed involve an allusion to German idealism (and more indirectly again, to Cartesian subjectivity). Yet what is regularly missed is the way Barth deploys these terms in order to subvert the sense of atomized and individuated selfhood familiar to these modern anthropologies. In the first place, God is spoken of as the Subject, and by specific implication our being subjects is not either something autonomously self-grounded, or even some-

"Barth-the-Idealist" thesis in sufficient detail, too readily making sweeping judgments. This necessary expansion could, for example, take the form of providing a more concrete and textually specific tracing of Barth’s relation to, and use of, Hegel. Fuller consideration of Roberts is presented in McDowell, *Hope in Barth’s Eschatology*.


60. *CD* 1/1, 311.

61. Ibid., 315.
thing of primary significance in the business of being-as-knowers or being-as-agents. The anthropocentric direction of modern epistemology is hereby interrogated (albeit implicitly since Barth's explicit targets are those who expressly are *theologically* shaped by modernity). 62

In the second place, Barth's notion of the "revealed unity" of the divine I-ness is pluriform, a density of non-identical self-identification that "is not to be confused with singularity or isolation." 63 It is this that subverts modalist readings of Barth. So, he declares, "Singularity and isolation are limitations necessarily connected with the concept of numerical unity in general. The numerical unity of the revealed God does not have these limitations." 64 From this he refuses to countenance the oneness of God as a being "alone ... without a counterpart." Instead, "In Himself His unity is neither singularity nor isolation. Herewith, i.e., with the doctrine of the Trinity, we step on to the soil of Christian monotheism." 65 It is precisely to depict the *relationality* of divine difference *ad intra*, then, that Barth utilizes modalist language. This is clear from the opening of §9 "The Triunity of God." The "three distinctive modes of being" subsist "in their mutual relations: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." 66 Importantly, Barth claims that while he prefers "not to use the term 'person' but rather 'mode (or way) of being,'" his "intention" is "to express by this term, not absolutely, but relatively better and more simply and clearly the same thing as is meant by 'person.'" 67

In this context, talk of God's threefold reiteration or "a repetition of God" (eine Wiederholung Gottes) 68 importantly stresses that each "mode of being" (Seinsweise) is not anything other than God's self-repetition, or three ways of being God in the *simultaneous* modes of Father, Son, and Spirit. 69 What Barth objects to is the way the earlier use of substance language has come to be understood, particularly in the conception

62. I am not, therefore, in obvious disagreement with Bruce McCormack's essay in this collection, although I am more convinced that Barth has a theological eye on Cartesian and Fichtean-type philosophies of identity and is presenting something of a theological challenge to them.
63. *CD* I/1, 354.
64. Ibid., 354.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., 348.
67. Ibid., 359.
68. Ibid., 229; *KD* I/1, 315.
69. Ibid., 360.
of an unmoved mover. Hence Collins’ further problem with Barth’s untrinitarian, and Augustinian, sounding presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity as self-moving fails to appreciate the function of the language in CD I/1. For Barth, there are not three “objects” called God, as if “God” is an umbrella term for these three beings, but one God and only one God whose plural life as Father, Son, and Spirit is united. The concept of “repetition” is Barth’s way here of describing divine unity-in-distinction, the threefoldness of God, without succumbing to modern notions of three objects/subjects or personalities. Nonetheless, in the repetition there is “a self-distinction of God from Himself.” It is this “becoming,” this threefold repetition of self-in-distinction, that is referred to as God’s “being.”

Pannenberg is a good example of those who badly miss Barth’s point here. He rightly notices that Hegel lies in the background, but goes too far in claiming identity in structure between Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity and Hegel’s idea of the unfolding self-consciousness of the Absolute. The mistake lies in seeing Barth as repeating in a new context Hegel rather than, in important ways, subverting him by, among other things, refusing to “imprison” the being of the trinity of God to history, as if the creature is necessary to the realization of God’s self-identifiability; refusing to develop the idea of divine subjectivity in the post-Cartesian direction of self-consciousness; and in undermining the successiveness of the Hegelian process. For this reason Pannenberg

70. For this reason it is not accurate to explain, as Paul M. Collins does in Trinitarian Theology West and East, 26, that Barth simply replaces traditional essence or substance talk with eventful concepts in a way that misses the fact that “The traditional language of essence or substance did not entirely exclude a concept of motion or movement (kinēsis),” as is evident in the Platonist tradition.

71. CD I/1, 349.

72. Ibid., 350–51.

73. Ibid., 316.

74. Collins does in Trinitarian Theology West and East, 28–29, make a crucial mistake over “the becoming which occurs in the incarnation and revelation of God ad extra,” glaringly missing the fact that if the being is in becoming then there is no being prior to becoming, and thus no two-stage deity in Barth. There is neither temporality nor ontological distinction in the notion of the reiteration, just as there was not for the fourth-century Nicenes when adopting the concept of the “eternal generation” of the Son.

75. See Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1:296.

76. Of course this does not mean, for Barth, a blanket ban on all things idealist. See Busch, Karl Barth, 387.
fails to hear Barth’s pluralizing account of the Godhead and consequently mistakenly asserts that Barth leaves “no room for a plurality of persons in the one God but only for different modes of being in the one divine subjectivity.” While Barth’s account cannot provide what Moltmann’s “social trinitarianism” or Pannenberg’s “historical trinitarianism” thinks is necessary for a trinitarian account of God, what results is nonetheless a sense that this divine Subject is utterly unlike any subject we can otherwise conceive of. Barth is opposed to developing analogies on grounds prior to learning from the scriptural witness to the event of divine self-revelation (Sich-Offenbaren) itself.

It is for this reason that Barth, following Augustine in De Trinitate, admits the necessary limitations of analogy and language. “[T]here are no analogies. This is the unique divine trinity in the unique divine unity.” 77 “There can be no question of rationalising because rationalising is neither theologically nor philosophically possible here. . . . But all rational wrestling with this mystery, the more serious it is, can lead only to its fresh and authentic interpretation and manifestation as a mystery.” 78 While language of “modes of relation” does not carry the sense of relations that critics value with the term “persons,” it is quite clear that Barth’s is a non-individuated divine Subject, with neither the reduction of the plurality to successiveness or moments of a neutral fourth or an essence underlying them. Hunsinger’s warning, then, is a good one: “modalism can be charged against Barth only out of ignorance, incompetence, or (willful) misunderstanding.” 79

Indeed, in order to emphasize the themes of divine prevenience and grounding of the creature in dependence on God Barth reverses the normal direction of analogy, and makes the ontological claim which deliberately utilizes and applies certain modern anthropological ideas as being primarily attributable to God: “The real person is not man but God,” and we are persons “by extension.” 80

Discourse of subjectivity belongs in modern epistemologies to crucial distinctions between subject and object. Barth’s transcription of such language does something considerably different, and his evidently

77. CD I/1, 364.
78. Ibid., 368.
80. CD II/1, 272.
modest use of I-Thou conceptuality, possibly taken from Isaak August Dorner, aids in the process. I-Thou terminology is particularly significant in preventing the reduction of God to the conditions of impersonality, to “It-ness,” even if it is not used to offer a simple conception of God as “personal” (“He-ness”)—language is theologically stretched to the breaking point here. In other words, discourse of divine subjectivity refuses the reduction of God to an object that the modern subject is set over against and can master, control, possess, or manipulate, as modern epistemologies’ subject-object scheme do invariably. Even in the event of God’s self-objectification God remains Subject, and therefore unpossessable and unmasterable.

This non-objectification of God is sustained by the correlation with three further categories in CD I/1—those of divine eventfulness or being-in-act, divine freedom, and divine hiddenness. The first of these, divine being-in-act, is well constructed to emphasize that revelation is God’s own self-presentation, the unveiling(-in-veiling) of God’s own subjectivity or personhood to “others.” But it does three important further but interrelated things. It thwarts any static arrangement of the life of God, thereby diminishing the divine Subject into the position of an object. Yet the negation of hiddenness and creaturely control is not the primary role of the discourse, since it functions to locate God’s givingness, as God’s own Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness. God’s being is act, and that being is therefore in God’s act.

Whatever else is going on, the point of the doctrine of the Trinity in I/1 is to stress the plural movement of God’s revealing, and for that reason, as much as any other, Barth has to stress the unity of the event, the singularity-in-multiplicity of revelation. In this context, then, charges that Barth is beginning from unity and only then, with some difficulty, considering the relationality of divine difference are inattentive to the contextual function of the doctrine in I/1. Barth develops a particular conceptual ethos (ethos rather than “model”) for a specific purpose: to dogmatically challenge modern theological accounts that

81. Revelation is God’s self-presentation, divine availability. Collins, Trinitarian Theology West and East, 4, speaks of “the category of event as the means of the self-revelation of God.” Following a brief discussion of John Macmurray and T. F. Torrance, he has distinguished between “act” (that appropriate to God’s being) and “event” (that means of the act’s being presented). However, rather than focus on God’s being-in-act, or God’s eventfulness, Collins problematically worries that Barth’s actualism “relates to an understanding of ‘history’” (ibid., 14).
assume the validity of certain epistemic arrangements emerging from individualized and epistemic subject-centered accounts of selfhood or personhood. At any rate, judging from the observations made earlier concerning Barth’s strategy of moving from biblical reflection on the Christic revelation in the pneumatic revealedness to consideration of the divine unity-in-plurality and plurality-in-unity, it is not at all clear that he has begun from the unity of divine being at all.82 And a further decisive implication is that it is not clear that Barth is even developing a “model” of the Trinity as such. He certainly denies that he is providing anything as closed as a “system of Trinitarian doctrine.”83 At this point it is worth indicating that several commentators feel something different emerges from the later volumes of the CD. While I do not want to dispute this, at least not without further detailed investigation, I would offer a couple of observations—principally, claims that CD I/1 and IV are substantially different need to consider the context of I/1 better before such a grandiose assertion can be suggested.84 But it is imperative also to recognize that even if there are significant presentational differences, what Williams describes as later “clarifications and refinements,” that this would not necessarily be a problem (unless, of course, the differences are materially significant) since the doctrine will have a different feel when considered in a different context.85 After all, this is the procedure Barth’s dogmatics develop so that God can be considered from the perspective of questions of prolegomena (CD I), from the divine being as perfection (CD II), from the perspective of creatureliness (CD III), the event of reconciliation (CD IV), and the finality of consummation (CD V). So, in his Evangelical Theology Barth develops the telling meta-

82. Much of the criticism of Barth here emerges from the sensibility inspired by Régnon, and popularized in relation to Barth by Moltmann. From here it has problematically ossified into standard textbook fare.

83. CD I/2, 879.

84. Laats, Doctrines of the Trinity in Eastern and Western Theologies, overdetermines the differences while failing to see both the context of I/1 and real continuities. McCormack’s essay in this volume claims that CD I/1 is composed during Barth’s years of apprenticeship, derivatively construing the doctrine of the Trinity before finding his own voice. While this is not untrue, as such, it underestimates the rich achievements of these earlier sections of the CD. Saying this, however, is not to suggest that Barth’s thought does not shift and develop in noticeable ways.

85. Williams, Wrestling with Angels, 119.
phor of the theologian’s constant moving around the mountain of the divine which produces compatible but different perspectives. 86

Concomitantly the being-in-act thematic, perhaps most notably, undermines the great ugly ditch of the Kantian noumena-phenomena dualism, at least in respect of the knowing of God. Revelation involves not merely God as God appears to us in God’s economy, but equally the very ding-an-sich so that the event of revelation has to do with the availability of God and nothing less than God in the divine Subject’s self-presentation. It is this which modalism is unable to provide since it seeks a God behind so-called “revelation,” and thus a solitary monad that is not self-revealed.

Finally, and consequently, the being-in-act thematic prevents the construal of revelation as that which is past, whether that be simply the Jesus who was, divinely authored texts, or any aspect of history. Revelation is a “performative” or “self-involving” concept in Barth which therefore does not imprison God “in a past revelatory event which can be the subject only of human recollection.” 87 The threefold movement of revelation cannot be conceived without the contemporaneousness of revealedness (even if that revealedness is focused intensively on the event of incarnation). 88 Yet the flipside criticism focuses on the worry that Barth’s eventful or actualist account of revelation is too occasionist, a disapproval that operates from the loosening of the revealedness from the revelation, something that I/1’s trinitarian account is equally a refusal of. Of course, it remains feasible to entertain the possibility that Barth was not entirely successful in staving off these theo-temporal dislocations, subsuming revelation and revealedness within one another when dealing with theological themes such as election, creation, ethics, and so on. Yet, more concrete reflection is needed either to sustain or contest these further charges.

86. Barth, Evangelical Theology, 34.
87. Citation from Williams, Wrestling with Angels, 109. See Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, chs. 9 and 13.
88. Given that that is so for Barth it appears distinctly odd that a number of critics claim that Barth’s account is past-centered, “retrospective rather than prospective” as David L. Mueller protests in Karl Barth (Waco: Word, 1972), 153. Moltmann’s charge that Barth’s thought is insufficiently eschatological derives not so much from revelatory pastness but from the moment of the revelatory present, the eternal present in time. See his Theology of Hope, 55–58.
The second of the three categories, divine freedom, is crucial for understanding God's acts as grace. Freedom denotes a non-necessitarianness. The point is not to disable the involvement of God, and thus to detract from the givingness of God (as if, with Moltmann's critique, Barth's theology lapses into arbitrariness). Nor does it hide God behind God's acts. Instead, it functions precisely as a clarification of the theological rule of God's being with and for the creature by qualifying that as talk of grace. 89

The third category, that of the divine mystery, is not designed to reserve God's being as the conceptuality of the deus absconditus does, to express the absence of ontic revealability from the revealedness sub contrariis. Even at this stage in his theological development, Barth's reflections suggest that hiddenness has less to do with God's essence, in contrast to God's revealedness, but more to do with the depths of the divine eventfulness in revelation. 90 Consequently, Barth's is not an account of divine mystery in the manner provided by post-Kantian accounts (a certain type of "the way of negation") that trace the limits of rationality for the epistemic subject. Failure to recognize this is a failure to understand how the mystery operates for Barth as theological protection of the non-objectivization of God and thus the denial of natural theology (this post-Kantian version is "mystery via a negative natural theology"). God is not construed as the passive Kantian noumena, the inactivity of the Limit, and thus the noumenal removed from phenomenality. Rather, for Barth, mystery, or "hiddenness" as he often prefers to term it in an allusion to Luther's theologia crucis and with less conceptually flat resonance, is given, revealed. God is the Subject of God's own hiddenness, hiddenness in revealedness, and this entails that the mystery appropriately spoken of God is not in contradistinction with God's revealedness. 91 The triune God is always infinitely richer than what is known, heard, and depended upon by creatures in their creaturely limitations and particularly as these are further hampered under the conditions of the creatures' sin.

89. "Lordship" is not a reference to "absolute freedom" for Barth. God's freedom is not an absolute freedom, a freedom that is separated from the freedom of God for us, but rather the absolute freedom of God.

90. Cf. CD II/1, 261.

91. Helm, "Karl Barth and the Visibility of God," 277–78, has missed this in CD I and II/1, claiming of II/2 that "God's hiddenness is fully eliminated."
Roberts declares Barth’s “treatment of the Trinity [to be] . . . grandiose.”92 What this section, among other things has suggested, is that there is, in fact, significant modesty in Barth’s account. This is particularly clear with his hesitancy concerning talk of the inner life of God, a reticence all too lacking in many other trinitarian accounts that can detail the consciousness and events of the divine life, invariably in ways that are culturally reflective. Barth’s properly limited and limiting account performs a specific task: he observes the significance of the broad lines of some of what is revealed, and redirects modern subjects to their grounding in the self-revelation of the triune God. Consequently, the focus in I/1 is on more noetic matters, the identifiability (or better, self-identifiability) of God in Jesus Christ and in the event of the Spirit’s revealing. It is God who is known. It is, then, proper that the matter of unity should be paramount, although it is contestable that this is so in I/1 or that it needs to be so. Thus the context of I/1 indicates something of why noetic categories dominate Barth’s envisioning of the Trinity. At least here, one can contest Alan Torrance’s criticism over Barth’s “failure” to root the doctrine in worship.93

But there is something else in Barth’s use of noetic categories that has to be understood: there is the suggestion that knowledge is not a category referring to simple cogitation, ideas, concepts or cerebrality, in other words what goes on in heads, even if that “knowledge” has practical import.94 This is clear from hints provided by two features of Barth’s reasoning. Firstly, that the subjectivity of God, God’s self-knowledge, is often depicted in terms of God’s relations. Secondly, that what is meant by the knowledge of God involves the creature being drawn into God’s relations. Echoing some of what was claimed earlier regarding the inter-


93. See Torrance, Persons in Communion. Interestingly, however, Torrance’s perspective seems to shift, see “The Trinity,” 79. Cf. Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, 144 n. 20.

94. Following several less well-read commentators, and particularly the broad thesis of Gustav Wingren, Alister McGrath complains that Barth relegates the article on justification to secondary status because of his epistemologicalization of theology, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Justification," 172–90; cf. Wingren, Theology in Conflict, 28f. Yet Barth refuses the doctrine’s centrality for several reasons, significantly because it functions only under the conditions of fallenness, whereas post-I/2 the organizing ontological “center” is the doctrine of election. While Barth does tend to use noetic concepts soteriologically, “knowledge” is broader than what goes on in the mind. Even the normally considerably more sophisticated and careful reading of Williams seems to miss this, see On Christian Theology, ch. 9; and Wrestling with Angels, ch. 7.
rogative and transformational use of categories familiar in epistemic matters, John Webster declares, "It is not so much that doctrines are transposed into epistemology as that epistemology is transposed into doctrine."95

As persons in the knowledge of, or communion with God, Barth's account demands that God's freedom not be abstracted from the freedom to be for us, and this is important to I/1 even if it only becomes particularly clear with II/2. Moreover, attention to issues of sociality or social mediatedness entails that God's freedom does not impose itself upon us.96 The knowledge of God is not a private matter of spiritual individuals, but the knowledge of the community of God's people among whom the event of revelation is mediated through the reading of the Scriptures and the proclamatory witness to the divine event.

What emerges from all this is a sense of God being ever-eventful; a properly theological anthropology of human dependency; and the agency of hearing mediationally and being made responsively responsible. It is surprisingly a very modest and under-determined account of God's inner life. There is, then, considerable sense in Jüngel's likening the function of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity of 1932 to Bultmann's anti-objectivizing demythologisation.97

Conclusion: Prayer and the Triune God

Using the term "God" is darkly difficult. As Lash claims, "there are no limits to the possibilities of idolatry, to the scope we have for absolutizing people, events, forces, projects, ideas, nations, and institutions."98 Theological discourse about God, the unpossessable "Absolute," however, precisely has to resist such "absolutizing" of the creaturely, otherwise it misidentifies the mystery of God's eternal richness, fails to check our propensities for idolatry, and domesticates the divine in patterns more expressive of human being. Simply multiplying the numbers does not solve the problem. There may be those who cry "Lord, Lord, Lord" but

95. Webster, Karl Barth, 82.
96. It is this sense of the *multiplicity of mediations*, all witnessing to the *event* of revelation in its *revealedness*, that is missed in Roberts' critique of christomonism in Barth, Roberts, *Theology on Its Way?* 87.
who are less than faithful to the nature of divine plurality. One of the contentions of this paper has been that Barth’s *CD I/1* may be more suggestive of good trinitarian description than is often supposed. It does not fall as foul of the criticisms, now deeply embedded in the textbook culture, as is often supposed. This is certainly not to say that there are not things in Barth’s account worth being concerned about, nor to flatten Barth’s later theological renegotiations. Nor is it to admit that a sufficiently rich theology of prayer can be developed out of its modest work.

Yet the implications of I/1 for theologically reconceiving prayer are pronounced, even if at this stage in our reflections they can be posited only as a few fairly broad hints concerning, or at most heuristic devices or even theologico-grammatical rules for, what counts as “prayer” when spoken of Christianly. In fact, there is a sense in which at every stage the suggestions of significance will have to be consciously broad. That, however, has less to do with any possible generalization involved in speaking of God than with the specific nature of theological language or talk of *this* that is called “God”, and the performative dynamic of a “practice.” Such theological hesitations would prevent easy moves from, for instance, a theology of obedience to God as sovereign to unconditional obedience to the monarch or the state, or from the wrath of God to vengeful practices of justice, and so on. 99

Firstly, “God” cannot be abstracted from the relations of divine self-expression in Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Spirit. That means that there can be no meaningful dogmatic sense of a theology of that is of “prayer in general” since prayer is what is appropriate in response to God, directed and shaped by he in whom God is “free for us.”

Secondly, God is not manipulable or instrumentalizable, and this is not because God is spoken of simply as “personal,” but rather because what is meant by “God” makes no sense of practices attempting to manipulate God. God is event and thus the Subject of God’s own non-objectifiable objectification. Consequently, the idea of prayer as gaining or getting from God by acting upon God, perhaps by utilizing an incantatory formula in order to be efficacious, is a dogmatic mistake. 100


100. At a later date I will consider the texts in which Barth seems to suggest prayer’s influencing God and of God’s repentance, e.g., *Prayer*, 13; *CD II/1*, 498.
Thirdly, God is always event and therefore never "object" in any simple sense. In that regard, questions have to be asked concerning the successiveness involved in relay-race type images of the event of praying—that the pray-er acts (prays) and God does not (the passivity of listening), then God acts (grants that prayed for) and the pray-er does not (the passivity of reception of the gift). Instead, what is meant by divine and human agencies in the practice and event of prayer is considerably more complex and less conflictual, and hence non-successive in any simple sense.

Fourthly, persons, in knowing the divine Subject, know themselves to be grounded in dependence and therefore to be in receipt of their lives in grace as gift, and consequently as ecstatically living in dependent response as those who are neither self-grounded nor self-defining autonomous subjects. In this sense, because it is response to God's prevenient agency, prayer is not primarily something we offer to God but rather that which involves our agency as an agency of responsiveness.

Fifthly, the context of the knowing of God is communal in the sense that the divine grace is ever giving through the community of worship. Therefore persons are not hearers either in individuated immediateness (since the directedness of God's giving is always mediated) or as atomised spiritual individuals. In this context, the notion of individuals at (private) prayer involves a vital dogmatic oversight. It is the church that is at prayer even when the one engaged in the performance is on her own.

Finally, as the subjectivity of the relations of grace that are communicative (or in communion) in and through the primary mediatorial form of divine incarnation, God is transformative of human subjectivity. Prayer, here, looks distinctly odd from an incarnationalist perspective when it bypasses considerations of needs not covered by common discourse of "the spiritual."

Brümmer's account of prayer, in contrast, lives and breathes a different air. It appears to run aground on the very thing that LaCugna, among others, claims is inappropriate when confessing the doctrine of the Trinity to be "the Christian doctrine of God": that there is "a God in general."101

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