

Discovery of the Sixth Ecumenical Council's Trinitarian Theology: Historical, Ecclesial, and Theological Implications

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ABSTRACT: For decades some Christian theologians, and some philosophers of religion, have labored at distinguishing Social Trinitarianism and non-Social Trinitarianism. Many have revised their models of the Trinity in light of counter-arguments or counter-evidence. For Christian theologians, or philosophers of religion, what counts as a good counter-argument or counter-evidence may (but need not) depend on specific respected theological authorities. Recently, some focus has been paid to what is called Conciliar Trinitarianism, which is the name for whatever is endorsed by, or rejected by, the first seven ecumenical councils regarding the Trinity. For those who respect these ecumenical councils as authoritative (to some extent), it would be useful to get a clearer understanding of Conciliar Trinitarianism in order to assist in evaluating contemporary models of the Trinity. In what follows I argue that the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III, in 680-681ce) made important contributions and clarifications to Conciliar Trinitarianism. Surprisingly, there is no secondary literature regarding these contributions and clarifications. After having made the historical case, I discuss the implications of Constantinople III for (i) our understanding of the place of the Pseudo-Athanasian creed in Trinitarian speculation, (ii) standard narratives about the division between Greek and Latin Trinitarian theology, and (iii) some contemporary models of the Trinity.

Introduction

‘Conciliar Trinitarianism’ is a name for all the claims about the Trinity that have been endorsed by, or rejected by, the first seven ecumenical councils (Branson, Jedwab, and Williams 2020, 1). The reference of this name is motivated by a dialectical concern. Given that most Christians believe in the Trinity (those that don’t, usually identify as Unitarian Christians), and given that belief in the Trinity is often put in conversation with the witness of ecumenical councils, especially Nicaea (325ce) and Constantinople I (381ce), it will be useful for these Christians to be aware of clarifications about the Trinity that were given in later ecumenical councils. If many Christians believe that Jesus is one person “from” and “in” two natures, the divine nature and a human nature, and that such an interpretation of Jesus was endorsed by later ecumenical councils (namely, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Constantinople II, and Constantinople III), then these Christians already take the witness of these later ecumenical councils as theologically respectable or authoritative in some sense. Such Christians may find it useful to know whether these later councils make any claims about the Trinity. If these later councils make claims about the Trinity, then these Christians may use ‘Conciliar Trinitarianism’ to help them evaluate contemporary models of the Trinity.

In Section One I begin with some historical background that helps us to understand

Journal of Analytic Theology, Vol. 10, Summer 2022

10.12978/jat.2022-10.180219220818

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what was endorsed by, and rejected by, Constantinople III regarding the Trinity. After surveying this background, in Section Two I summarize what Constantinople III claims about the Trinity. In Section Three I give the historical evidence for my summary of the Trinitarian theology of Constantinople III. In Section Four I compare what Constantinople III says about the Trinity in relation to the Pseudo-Athanasian creed in order to provide a new evaluation of the place of the latter in the history of Trinitarian theology.

In Section Five, I discuss some historical and theological implications from the discovery of Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology. This discovery undermines a supposed difference between historical "Latin" and "Greek" Trinitarian theologies. While many have supposed that it is was "Latin" theologians who predominately insisted on the numerical unity of the divine essence or nature, and that the divine persons share numerically the same actions, Constantinople III makes clear that it was Greek theological sources, and not Latin theological sources, that were used to make these claims. In a nutshell, the so-called "Latin" model (as it is called in contemporary philosophy of religion) of the Trinity really is the "Greek" model endorsed by Constantinople III, and the so-called "Greek" Social model (as it is called today) really is closely aligned with the miaphysite ontology of the Trinity that was rejected by Constantinople III. Further, I compare Constantinople III with a contemporary Social model (by William Hasker), a contemporary non-Social model (by Brian Leftow), and my hybrid model that I originally called a Latin Social model, but in light of the research in this paper I now prefer to call it a Conciliar Social model. I argue that Hasker's Social and Leftow's non-Social model are inconsistent with Constantinople III, and my hybrid model is consistent with Constantinople III. I conclude with what this discovery may mean for historians of ancient Christian theology and their ongoing protestations against contemporary Social models of the Trinity.

1. Some Background to Constantinople III

It is widely known that Constantinople III (680-681ce) came about as a response to theological controversies regarding the metaphysics of the Incarnation. However, there were also other forces at work that motivated Constantinople III. There were political worries, which were believed to be addressed through theological agreement in an ecumenical council (Ekonomou 2009, 201-203). And, there was also the theological concern about how 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' relate to each other in the context of the Trinity. By taking a closer look at the primary documents of Constantinople III it becomes clear that there was intense concern about how 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' were to be understood in the case of the Trinity *and* in the case of the Incarnation. It is perhaps surprising that the serious theological reflections on the Trinity, which are found in the Acts of this Council and in the council's Statement of Faith, have gone mostly, if not entirely, unnoticed.¹ In the Acts of this Council there are explicit expressions of concern about how we should understand 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' in general, and what the implications of that relationship has on the number of (e.g.) natures, powers, and activities. Does the number of Christ's activities correlate to (or depend on) the number of his natures and powers, or to the number of *hypostases*? Does the number of the Father, Son, and Holy

¹ There is no English translation of all the Acts of Constantinople III. Though, a few excerpts of it are translated in Percival (1988) and fewer excerpts in Tanner (1990). The *Catholic Encyclopedia* entry by T. Shahan (1908) on the Third Council of Constantinople focuses entirely on Christology and Papal authority. There is no mention of the Trinity in it. All translations that are not credited to this or that translator are my own.

Spirit's activities correlate to (or depend on) the number of divine natures and powers, or correlate to (or depends on) the number of divine *hypostases*? (To be clear, the council is considering whether each divine *hypostasis* has their own action that is numerically distinct from another divine *hypostasis*'s action of the same action-type.) Constantinople III answered both of these questions. The council's statements regarding the Trinity are not merely linguistic counting rules about how we should speak, but they are about the *referents* of the terms 'hypostasis', 'ousia', 'dunamis', etc.

In his recently published, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics*, Johannes Zachhuber has shed light on how it came about that there were debates about *ousia* and *hypostasis* in general from the mid-400s to the early 600s (Zachhuber 2020, 32-46).² The essentials of his narrative are as follows. Basil of Caesarea responded to Eunomius in order to defend the equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³ Basil claimed that the same terms can be predicated of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, without the Son or Holy Spirit being "lesser" than the Father. Each is divine; each is all-wise, etc. This is an account of how the same concepts are predicated of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

According to Zachhuber, Gregory of Nyssa agreed with Basil but added concern about the referents of these terms that are predicated of each divine *hypostasis*. This concern is expressed in the so-called *Epistle 38*. While this text has been ascribed to Basil, many scholars are inclined to ascribe it to Gregory. In any case, my narrative and overall argument does not depend on which is the actual author. As it happens, I side with those who believe Gregory was the author and will say that Gregory is the author of the so-called *Epistle 38*, also called *On the Difference between Ousia and Hypostasis*.⁴ In this text, Gregory claims that certain terms are predicated in general, and other terms are predicated of individuals. So, we can say that Peter is a human being, and Paul is a human being. The term 'human being' is predicated in general of each of them. Zachhuber labels this the "abstract account" of 'ousia.' That is, the same concepts are each predicated of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But, what about the referent of the term 'human being', or the term 'deity'? For Gregory, the referent for each such term is one indivisible thing, a nature, that only exists in individuals.

It is important to point out that there are (at least) two ways that Gregory's existence-condition for an essence ('ousia') or nature ('phusis') has been interpreted and translated. One way is to interpret an essence or nature as an immanent universal; it is one indivisible thing that only exists in individuals. So, human nature only exists in each and every individual human being. This is a *distributive* interpretation of Gregory's existence-condition; numerically the same indivisible thing is distributed in each and every human being. This means that each human being is not a part of human nature, but rather the whole of human nature is in each human being. This way of interpreting Gregory can be seen in one English translation of a passage near the beginning of the so-called *Epistle 38*:

Of all nouns the sense of some, which are predicated of subjects plural and numerically various, is more general; as for instance 'man'. When we so say, we employ the noun to indicate *the common nature [ten koinen phusin]*, and do not confine our meaning to any one man in particular who is known by that name. Peter, for instance is no more man than Andrew, John or James. The predicate therefore being common, and extending

² This trend in theology during this period is concisely stated by U.M. Lang (2001b, 433-434).

³ Zachhuber (2020, 32-46).

⁴ For discussion and overview of these issues, see Zachhuber (2020, 46-48). The text can be found in Basil of Caesarea (1957).

to all the individuals ranked under the same name, requires some note of distinction whereby we may understand not man in general, but Peter or John in particular.⁵

This translation has “the common nature” and goes on to say that the noun “extend[s] to all the individuals ranked under the same name.” This may suggest a distributive interpretation because it suggests that a common nature is predicated of each individual human being. This explains the indefiniteness of the noun by saying that it applies to each individual human being. But there is not a part-whole relationship, suggested by words like “class,” that is used to explain the indefiniteness and extension of the noun.

Another way to interpret Gregory's existence-condition has been to suppose that an essence or nature exists only in the totality or collection of all (co-specific) individuals. This is the *collective* interpretation. So, human nature only exists as the totality or collection of all individual human beings. This interpretation of Gregory may be suggested in the following different translation of the same passage from the so-called *Epistle 38*:

Those nouns which are predicated of subjects plural and numerically diverse have a more general meaning, as for example ‘man.’ For when you say ‘man,’ you thereby signify *the general class* [*ten koinen phusin*], and do not specify any man who is particularly known by that name. For ‘man’ is no less applicable to Peter, than to Andrew, John, or James. This common element of the thing predicated, seeing that it refers to all alike who are included under the same term, demands a further note of distinction if we are to understand, not merely man in general, but Peter, or John, in particular.⁶

This translation has “the general class” and goes on to say there is a “common element of the thing predicated, seeing that it refers to all alike who are included under the same term.” This may suggest a collective interpretation because it indicates that the indefiniteness of the noun should be understood by the term “general class,” which implies a part-whole relationship. Likewise, the extension of the noun is (suggested to be) explained by the same part-whole relationship.

Here are some other examples of a collective statement versus a distributive statement. One collective statement is: “There are 900 million puppies.” The number is predicated of the totality or collection of all puppies. By contrast, one distributive statement is: “Puppies are small.” The term ‘small’ is predicated of each puppy, and it is not predicated of the totality or collection of all puppies. The relevant ontological difference between these two interpretations of Gregory's existence condition is that the distributive interpretation is inconsistent with the essence or nature being numerically divided into ‘particular essences’ or ‘particular natures,’ and the collectivist interpretation is consistent with the essence or nature being numerically divided into ‘particular essences’ or ‘particular natures.’ The reason this is the case is that on the collectivist interpretation there needs to be numerically distinct instances (e.g., ‘particular essences’ or ‘particular natures’) of a generic essence or nature, in order for a true predication to be made of the totality. By contrast, the distributive interpretation maintains that there is just one thing, a common nature, and it exists in each (co-specific) individual.

Zachhuber sides with the collective interpretation of Gregory.⁷ He calls Gregory's existence-condition for an essence or nature the “concrete account,” since the existence-

⁵ Basil of Caesarea (1989, 137).

⁶ Basil of Caesarea (1961, 197, 199).

⁷ See Zachhuber (2014, 61-70).

condition concerns a thing (or things) and not a concept or a word that refers to a thing or things. For Zachhuber, the “concrete account” says that an essence or nature only exists as the totality or collection of all (co-specific) individuals.

(Below I argue that Constantinople III interprets Gregory according to the distributive interpretation, it affirms the distributive interpretation, and it rejects the collective interpretation. Elsewhere,⁸ I have discussed how Gregory is not committed to the collective interpretation but is best interpreted as affirming the distribution of an indivisible common nature.)

Returning to Zachhuber's historical narrative, in the 400s there was more theological reflection on the Incarnation, as is well known from the debates between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius, and from the third ecumenical council in Ephesus that sided with Cyril over Nestorius. What happened in the midst of these discussions of the Incarnation was that some theologians began to apply the “Classical Cappadocian” account of the Trinity to the Incarnation.⁹ That is, the terms ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis’ were debated in significant detail in how they should apply to the Incarnation. These disputes over the terms ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis’ encouraged theologians to reflect on ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis’ in general, and how they should apply to the Incarnation in particular.

Zachhuber helpfully shows how the “Classical Cappadocian” account was received in different ways by different theological traditions regarding the Incarnation. He shows how some miaphysite theologians, especially Severus of Antioch, interpreted and developed the “Classical Cappadocian” account in the context of the Incarnation.¹⁰ For Severus, we should interpret Gregory of Nyssa's “concrete account” of *ousia* as implying that for each *hypostasis* there is a particular essence or particular nature. This means that each *hypostasis* is a particular member of a class, and the *ousia* is ontologically divided into particular essences (*ousiai*) or natures (*phuseis*). Given his understanding that an *ousia* only exists in individuals *and* that *ousia* is the collection or totality of all such particulars, Severus can claim that only God the Son's particular divine nature became united with a human nature such that the result of this union was a new composite particular nature. On this account, Jesus is “from” a human nature, but not “in” a human nature. The latter stipulation (that a human nature exists ‘in’ Christ), for Severus, would imply that Jesus was united to a human person (*hypostasis*). In the case of the Trinity, Severus also accepted ‘particular natures’ such that the divine *ousia* is the collection of three particular divine essences (*ousiai*). In the following passage, Severus reports an objection from his opponent, John the Grammarian (i.e. John of Caesarea) who worries about the claim that the divine *ousia* can be numerically divided:

[John speaking in the voice of Severus:] “But if you [i.e. John] affirm that the Christ has two essences, it is also necessary to affirm that the Father and the Spirit and (as we may say in short) the holy Trinity assumed the flesh of the whole of humanity, that is of the human race.” Such are the objections of people [i.e. Severus] who oppose us [i.e. John]. For they [i.e. Severus] suppose that the essence of the divinity exists divisibly, and that some of it is seen in the Father, some of it in the Son, and some of it in the holy Spirit, such that each single element is recognized from the *hypostases* in part, but not in all of those things which are the property of the divinity. But we have not reached such ungodliness as to suppose that there is division or partition in the

⁸ Williams (2019, 56-59).

⁹ Zachhuber (2020, 72-93).

¹⁰ Zachhuber (2020, 119-144).

divine essence; but we affirm that each designated *hypostasis* possesses without diminution all the marks of the divinity – goodness, operation, and all those things which are of uncreated nature. For likewise we affirm the Trinity co-essential, such that the same essence is recognized perfectly in three *hypostases*.¹¹

John suggests that the one divine essence is *distributed* in each divine *hypostasis* and denies that the divine essence is *numerically divided* into each divine *hypostasis*. In response, Severus denies that this is a problem:

[W]e have used the word ‘nature’ and ‘essence’ and ‘hypostasis’ and all these terms which are similar and approximate in sense; and we accepted the word ‘essence’, which is indicative of generic signification concerning the holy Trinity; and we affirmed that the one essence [*ousia*] is the three *hypostases* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, that is of the one God. For the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, just as one might say that Peter and Paul and John are one humanity. [...] Essence [*ousia*] is patient of division: for the division of essence [*ousia*] is what may be one of diverse essence [*ousia*] out of *hypostases*.¹²

I have commented on this passage in relation to Severus's Trinitarian theology:

Severus suggests that the divine *ousia* is (identical to or consists of?) the collection of divine *hypostases*, and, for example, humanity is (identical to or consists of?) the collection of particular humans. Severus also says, “For the Son is one of the *hypostases* which are based in the substance [*ousia*] and are included in the generic signification, whereas the substance [*ousia*] and the generic signification (i.e. the Godhead) is inclusive of three *hypostases* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with each of the *hypostases* participating fully in the concept of the substance [*ousia*] and being God.” Saying that each person “participates fully” in the concept of the divine substance [*ousia*] suggests that the concept of the divine substance [*ousia*] is predicable of each *hypostasis*. Nonetheless, the (extramental) divine substance [*ousia*] is (identical to or consists of?) the collection of *hypostases*.¹³

Whereas Severus supposed that the totality or collection of all divine *hypostases* is an extramental, real collection, John Philoponus later responded by arguing that only the three divine *hypostases* are real; the collection as such is only a concept in our minds.¹⁴ As Zachhuber shows, Severus's suggestion of ‘particular natures’ - one particular nature for each divine *hypostasis* - is what provided some of the groundwork for later theologians like John Philoponus and John Ascouzanges to offer full-throated defenses of the claim that the number of divine natures just is the number of divine *hypostases*. John Ascouzanges professed, “I confess natures, substances, and divinities according to the number of hypostases.”¹⁵ Whereas Severus claimed that the divine ‘ousia’ has a generic signification, such that it is predicated of each divine

¹¹ Severus of Antioch (2004, 83).

¹² Severus of Antioch (2004, 85). See Williams (2019, 61-65).

¹³ Williams (2019, 63-64).

¹⁴ See Williams (2019, 64-65).

¹⁵ The quotation of John Ascouzanges is from Zachhuber (2020, 156). For more on the “tritheist” controversy that relates to the Miaphysite tradition, see Uwe Michael Lang (2001). See also Allen (2009, 10ff).

hypostasis, *and*, that the divine 'ousia' is the (collection of) the three divine *hypostases*, Philoponus and Ascountzanges were ontologically reductionistic regarding the second claim. According to Philoponus, the shared unity of the divine 'ousia' between the divine *hypostases* is only conceptual; it is not real. Opponents of Philoponus and Ascountzanges called them "tritheist," "polytheist," and "poly-ousiast."¹⁶ Their opponents included those committed to the fifth ecumenical council in Chalcedon (those labeled Chalcedonians or neo-Chalcedonians), and those who rejected Chalcedon for fear that it was really supportive of Nestorianism (those labeled Miaphysites). We can see a Miaphysite backlash (from the "Miaphysite anti-tritheists") in figures such as Damian of Alexandria and Peter of Callinicum.¹⁷

What is relevant here is the ontology which our understanding of the meanings of 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' inform. John Ascountzanges and later John Philoponus argued that the number of natures just is the number of *hypostases*. (Put otherwise, the number of natures is what divides or distinguishes the number of *hypostases*.) According to this ontology, if there are three divine *hypostases*, then there are three divine natures. Conversely, if Christ is one hypostasis, then he has but one composite nature, and not two natures. An accepted implication of this ontological counting rule was that the number of natures, powers, activities is co-extensive with the number of *hypostases*. It is important to recognize that belief in 'particular natures' is what supported this ontology of the Trinity and Incarnation. Moreover, this assumption, namely that the number of activities (*energeiai*) are co-extensive with the number of *hypostases*, was what largely supported the "monergist" position. Since Christ is just one *hypostasis*, it would follow that he does not perform divine actions *and* human actions that are numerically distinct from each other, but instead he performs 'divine-human' actions. (I leave aside other issues that motivated this position.) The fifth ecumenical council, Constantinople II in 553ce, addressed and rejected this "monergist" position.

Zachhuber provides several key examples of theologians writing about 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' in general after Constantinople II in 553ce. He points to treatises that begin with general definitions of these terms,¹⁸ along with various quotations from respected people, especially Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Aristotle, regarding these terms. To take just one example, Pamphilus expresses worry about the "Severans" who posit "particular natures" (note that 'particular natures' (*phuseis*) and 'particular essences' (*ousiai*) are co-extensive):

The Severans who continue to work against the truth, blaspheme even now accepting three *ousiai* in the holy and worshipful Trinity. Some of them say, in addition to their other errors, that the Son was begotten from the Father, and the Spirit sent forth, as an *ousia* from an *ousia*. While they seemingly only speak of 'three *ousiai*?', the present, careful argument shows that they have caught the disease of tritheism.¹⁹

Zachhuber concludes *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics* by focusing on Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus. These are important case studies in the history of theorizing about 'ousia' and 'hypostasis.' It's well-known, for example, that Maximus

¹⁶ See Ebied, Roey, and Wickham (1981, 20-33).

¹⁷ See Zachhuber (2020, 170-183).

¹⁸ Many of Zachhuber's authors wrote in Greek. We may add John Maxentius and Rusticus the Deacon, who wrote in Latin. Each wrote responses to the "Severans" and the Nestorians, and each debated the meaning of "essentia" and "persona" in the context of the Trinity and the Incarnation. For discussion and references, see Williams (2020a, 86-96).

¹⁹ Zachhuber (2020, 226).

strongly insisted on Christ's two natural wills (the divine will, and a human will). John of Damascus is a good way to conclude the historical survey, given that he sums up much of the Eastern orthodox theology.

However, one source that he doesn't mention is the third ecumenical council, Constantinople III in 680-681ce. As I see it, what Zachhuber has provided for us, among other things, are some important backgrounds that help to explain why it was that Constantinople III not only included statements about Christ's two wills, but also included statements about how 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' should be understood with regard to the Trinity. Without this background information, we might overlook the presence and significance of the Trinitarian theology in Constantinople III, as most everyone seems to have done.²⁰ It may not be too strong to say that the Trinitarian theology of Constantinople III is one of the most significant omissions in the history of Christian theology. You (or at least, I) can't find discussion of it anywhere, whether in history of theology books or systematic theology books, apart from the original documents themselves.

2. Summary of the Trinitarian Theology of Constantinople III

Here is some further context for Constantinople III. According to Norman Tanner, SJ:

To make an end of the Monothelite controversy, Emperor Constantine IV asked Pope Donus in 678 to send twelve bishops and four western Greek monastic superiors to represent the pope at the assembly of eastern and western theologians. Pope Agatho, who meanwhile had succeeded Donus, ordered consultation in the west on this important matter. Around Easter 680 a synod in Rome of 125 Italian bishops, with Pope Agatho presiding, assessed the replies of the regional synods of the west and composed a profession of faith in which Monothelism was condemned. Legates of the pope to this profession to Constantinople, arriving at the beginning of September 680.

On 10 September 680 the emperor issued an edict to Patriarch George of Constantinople, ordering a council of bishops to be convoked. The council assembled on 7 November in the hall of the imperial palace in Constantinople. It immediately called itself an ecumenical council. There were 18 sessions, at the first eleven of which the emperor presided.

In the 8th session, on 7 March 681, the council adopted the teaching of Pope Agatho in condemnation of Monothelism. Patriarch Macarios of Antioch was one of the few who refused his assent; he was deposed in the 12th session.

The doctrinal conclusions of the council were defined in the 17th session and promulgated in the 18th and last session on 16 September 681. The acts of the council, signed both by 174 fathers and finally by the emperor himself, were sent to Pope Leo II, who had succeeded Agatho, and he, when he had approved them, ordered them to be translated into Latin and to be signed by all the bishops of the west. Constantine

²⁰ There is no discussion of this in any secondary literature that I have surveyed regarding Constantinople III. For example, there is no mention of Constantinople III's claims about the Trinity in Meister (2016, 271-274), nor in Pelikan and Hotchkiss (2003, 216-229), nor in Leith (1982, 50-53), nor in Baus, Beck, Ewig, and Vogt (1980, 462-463), nor in Schaff (1910, 771-772). Williams (2020b, 99-101) may be the first (recent) instance of such discussion.

IV, however, promulgated the decrees of the council in all parts of the empire by imperial edict.²¹

The major figures in this council were Emperor Constantine IV, Patriarch George of Constantinople, Pope Agatho (who was represented by George), and the many bishops and other priests that were present (about 174 people). The council approved of the statement of faith that Pope Agatho and the 125 bishops had composed at a synod just prior to the council in Constantinople;²² and, it approved the letter that Pope Agatho wrote to the Emperor Constantine IV.²³ While Tanner's summary of the figures involved in the council and the council's discussion of Christ's two wills is useful, it leaves out any mention of Trinitarian theology. It leaves out other documents that were endorsed by the council, particularly St. Sophronius of Jerusalem's *Synodical Letter*. The council also used Emperor Justinian's *Letter to Zoilus (Against the Monophysites)* and *Edict on the Right Faith* in support of its conclusions. Although Tanner mentions Constantine IV's edict, he does not mention that it includes significant Trinitarian theology that reflects what Agatho, Sophronius, and Justinian wrote about the Trinity. Furthermore, the selections translated by Tanner are entirely focused on Christology. This gives the impression that there was no discussion of the Trinity at Constantinople III. Similarly, in Jacques Dupuis's massive, edited volume, *The Christian Faith: In the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, which includes many ecclesial documents in relation to many theological topics, the only passage from Constantinople III is a part of the statement of faith about Christ's two wills.²⁴ And, the only theological content discussed about Constantinople III in the editorial commentary is the debate about the number of Christ's wills.

By contrast, Henry Percival's English translation from the Post-Nicene Fathers series, includes excerpts from Pope Agatho's *Letter to the Emperor*, and Pope Agatho's and the 125 bishops' *Letter to the Council*. Percival also includes the council's endorsement of Sophronius's *Synodical Letter*, but no translation of any part of that letter. Furthermore, it includes an excerpt from Constantine IV's edict that discusses Christ's two wills, but it does not include the opening paragraphs in this edict that discuss Trinitarian theology.

What, then, is Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology? In this section I summarize the teachings, and in the next section I will give the relevant historical evidence for this summary. Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology includes eleven claims. It is not an exhaustive list, but it is significantly representative of Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology. Below I do not include any claim about the monarchy of God the Father. (There are a few passages that could be used to support the monarchy of the Father, but there are also a few passages that could be used to undermine this claim. My judgment is that the council is in favor of the monarchy of the Father. This may be corroborated by the fact that the council does *not* claim that the Holy Spirit is from "the Father *and the Son*" and it endorses the previous five ecumenical councils which are traditionally taken to endorse the monarchy of the Father.) The numbers in brackets refer to the passages that I quote in the next section (Section Three) that are from, or endorsed by, Constantinople III:

²¹ Tanner (1990, 121).

²² Riedinger (1992, 889, ln. 20-32).

²³ Riedinger (1990, 196, ln. 3 / 197, ln. 3 - 260, ln. 16 / 261, ln. 15). The original Greek text is referenced on the left side of the '/', and the original Latin translation is referenced on the right side of the '/'. Riedinger (1992, 888, ln. 17-30). There was no original Latin translation of the latter text.

²⁴ Dupuis (2001, 246-247).

- (1) There is one God. [3, 4, 5, 7]
- (2) There are three divine *hypostases*. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7]
- (3) These three *hypostases* are one undivided deity. [3, 4, 5, 7]
- (4) These three *hypostases* share numerically the same divine essence and nature. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7]
- (5) These three *hypostases* share numerically the same will-power and operations. [1, 2, 3]
- (6) The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. [4, 5, 7]
- (7) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct from one another. [3, 4, 5, 7]
- (8) The Son is born from the Father, from eternity. [3]
- (9) The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, from eternity. [3]
- (10) There are not three Gods of different natures. [5, 7]
- (11) There are not three Gods of merely the same specific essence, nature, will-power, and operation. [3, 7]

Constantinople III has (at least) five significant contributions or clarifications to Conciliar Trinitarianism.

First, Constantinople III makes clear how the orthodox faith understands will-powers and operations (actions) in relation to natures and *hypostases*. The “canonical logic,” which is endorsed by Constantinople III, is that the number of wills, powers, and operations correspond to the number of essences or natures, and *not* to the number of *hypostases*. Put otherwise, the number of wills, powers, and operation depends on the number of natures. This fits with the Aristotelian understanding of ‘phusis’ (nature) as the principle of action. So, if there is numerically one divine essence or nature, then there is numerically one divine will-power. It is important to clarify what is meant regarding operations or actions. I take it that the claim is this: for any divine action-type, the number of action-tokens depends on the number of natures and not on the number of divine *hypostases*.

Second, Constantinople III clarifies that the unity of the divine essence and nature is *numerical unity*. The divine *hypostases* share numerically the same divine essence and nature, and not merely specifically or generically the same divine essence and nature.

Third, it makes explicit that the divine *hypostases*’ operations (actions) are inseparable because they share *numerically the same actions*. The explanation is important because it implies that the inseparability of their actions is not to be understood in terms of the divine *hypostases* necessarily willing the same thing despite each performing their own numerically distinct action. Rather, their actions are inseparable because they are numerically the same.

Fourth, it affirms that each *hypostasis* “is God.”

And *fifth*, it denies that there are “three Gods,” whether of different natures (as Arius said) or of the same (merely) co-specific nature (as John Philoponus said). This rejection of the second disjunct is unique to Constantinople III.

There are, of course, many ecclesial documents and individual theologians that addressed these five claims beforehand, but if we restrict ourselves to conciliar documents (that is, the first seven ecumenical councils), it’s only in Constantinople III that the conjunction of these five claims is explicit.

Given that the divine essence or nature is *numerically one* and given that the number of wills, powers, and operations, just is the number of natures, Constantinople III affirms that there is numerically one divine will (that is, what we would call a “will power”), numerically one divine power, and numerically one divine operation. In other words, the number of divine operations

is not numerically divided up such that there is one (numerically unshared) operation for each divine *hypostasis*. Rather, the divine *hypostases* share numerically the same operations. The council denies that there are “personal wills” or “personal operations.” (See quotations marked [1], [2], and [3] lines 12-13, for the relevant quotation. I discuss this in Section 3.) So, given this “canonical logic,” if there is numerically one divine nature, then there is numerically one divine will. Moreover, even though there are three divine *hypostases*, it does not follow that there are numerically three divinities, nor three divine natures, nor three divine will-powers that correlate to the number of divine *hypostases*. Constantinople III denies that there are “three Gods.” This contrasts with Arius because Constantinople III not only denies “three Gods” of different natures (as Arius said), but it also denies “three Gods” of (merely) the same specific nature (as John Philoponus said).

3. The Evidence for Constantinople III's Trinitarian Theology

In what follows I give the evidence for the above summary. I discuss seven key passages that are endorsed by Constantinople III. If I identify just one passage that affirms what I claim the council affirms, or identify one passage that denies what I claim the council denies, then that would be sufficient evidence for my claims that the council endorsed such and such a claim, and the council denied some other claim. However, it is historically important to show that participants in Constantinople III were aware of the “canonical logic” mentioned above and its connection to Trinitarian theology, and that they made specific judgments about these ontological claims regarding the Trinity *and* the Incarnation. While the issue of Christ's two wills was (what we might call) the ultimate *target* issue of conversation in the council, it is important to point out that the Trinitarian theology was not only endorsed by Constantinople III, but it was used, in part, to justify its judgment that Christ has two wills (the divine will and a human will). And, Constantinople III denied the new “tritheism” that came from the same miaphysite metaphysics that had denied that Christ has “two wills” and had affirmed that Christ has one composite will - that is, “one theandric will.” In short, Constantinople III got at the root mistake that led some miaphysites to assert three divine wills, or to deny that there are two wills ‘in’ Christ. As I see it, the Trinitarian theology had two functions in the council. First, the Trinitarian theology clarified claims about the Trinity by affirming some claims and rejecting other claims. Second, the Trinitarian theology was used to support claims about Christ's two wills.

In the fourth session of the council both Pope Agatho's *Letter to Emperor Constantine IV* and Pope Agatho and the 125 Bishops' *Letter to the Council* were read aloud. The content of these letters was referred to in the council as “Pope Agatho's suggestions.” And, all of these “suggestions” were endorsed by Constantinople III in the ninth session²⁵ and repeated in the council's letter to Pope Agatho.²⁶ (However, not all participants in the council agreed with Pope Agatho's “suggestions.” Macarios, Archbishop of Antioch, and Stephen, a monk and Macarios's disciple, did not accept these “suggestions.” They insisted that Christ's will is numerically one, that is, a “theandric” will.²⁷ They appealed to Pseudo-Dionysius for this term - though historians point out that such exegesis of Pseudo-Dionysius is questionable.)²⁸

²⁵ See Riedinger (1990, 196, ln. 3 / 197, ln. 3 - 260, ln. 16 / 261, ln. 15).

²⁶ See Riedinger (1992, 888, ln. 17-30; 889, ln. 20-32).

²⁷ See Riedinger (1990, 216, ln. 23-28 / 217, ln. 23-27).

²⁸ See Price (2007, 192-195).

In Pope Agatho's *Letter to Emperor Constantine IV*, we find the following passage:

[1] This then is the status of our evangelical and Apostolic faith, to wit, that as we confess the holy and inseparable Trinity, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to be [*einai*] of one deity, of one nature and essence, so we will profess also that it has one natural will, power, operation, domination, majesty, potency, and glory. And whatever is said of the same Holy Trinity essentially in singular number [*henikoi arithmoi*] we apprehend [*katalambanometha*] as from the one nature of the three co-essential *prosopa*, having been so taught by canonical logic [*kanonikoi logoi*].²⁹

It is noteworthy that Agatho includes “natural will, power, [and] *operation*,” in the list of what is predicated of the singular divine nature that exists only in each and every divine *hypostasis*. The inclusion of “singular number” and “operation” are in addition to what we find in a passage from Constantinople II. From Constantinople II we read:

If anyone will not confess that Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are one nature or essence, that they have one power and authority, that there is a co-essential Trinity, one deity to be adored in three *hypostases* or *prosopa*; let him be anathema. For there is only one God and Father, from whom all things come, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit, in whom all things are.³⁰

In this passage from Constantinople II, the terms that are predicated of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are, 'one nature' (*mian phusis*), 'one essence' (*mian ousia*), 'one power and authority' (*mia te dunamin kai exousian*), and 'one deity' (*mian theoteta*). These terms draw our attention to what the Father is, what the Son is, and what the Holy Spirit is. And although the last sentence draws our attention to the Scriptural language from 1 Cor. 8:6 regarding the creation of the world, we do not find a term or terms for the divine *hypostases*' activities or operations. And we do not find any specific clarification about how to interpret this Scriptural text. Should we interpret this in a way that is consistent with an account according to which each divine *hypostasis* brings about their own activity such that the divine *hypostases*' activities are numerically distinct from each other? Or should we interpret this in a way that is consistent with an account according to which the divine *hypostases* share numerically the same activity? No clarification (so far as I can tell) is given by Constantinople II.

But given [1] from Constantinople III, we find some clarification. The orthodox teaching is that the number of activities or operations is to be apprehended with the number of essences or natures, and the number of activities or operations is not to be apprehended with the number of divine *hypostases*. To be clearer, I take it that the claim is that each divine action-token is shared by the three divine *hypostases*, and it is not the case that one and only one divine *hypostasis* can perform one action-token. (Many Social models of the Trinity would say that the divine *hypostases* share the same action types but not the same action tokens.)

In *Letter to the Emperor, Constantine IV*, Pope Agatho uses this “canonical logic” regarding the Trinity and applies it to the Incarnation:

[2] Consequently, therefore, according to the rule of the holy Catholic and Apostolic

²⁹ Riedinger (1990, 58, ln. 25 / 59, ln. 23 - 60, ln. 2 / 61, ln. 3). Translated by Percival (1988, 330), with slight modifications by me.

³⁰ Tanner (1990, 114).

Church of Christ, she also confesses and preaches that there are in [Christ] two natural wills and two natural operations. For if anybody should mean a personal will [*bean gar tis prosopikon noesei to thelema*], when in the holy Trinity there are said to be three *persons* [*prosopa*], it would be necessary that there should be asserted three personal wills and three personal operations [*tria prosopika thelemata kai treis prosopikas energieas*] (which is absurd and truly profane). Since, as the truth of the Christian faith holds, the will is natural, where the one nature of the holy and inseparable Trinity is spoken of, it must be consistently understood that there is one natural will and one natural operation [*hen phusikon thelema kai mia phusike energiea*].³¹

In [2], Agatho is responding to the view according to which there is just one will in the incarnate Christ. On this account, we should apprehend the number of wills according to the number of *hypostases*. If we were to accept such a claim, then when applied to the Trinity it would follow that there would be “three personal wills and three personal operations.” But Agatho and the council reject this as “absurd and truly profane” because the church teaches that a natural will is found in a nature, and not in a *hypostasis* as such. The argument is a *reductio* or *modus tollens*:

Argument from Canonical Logic regarding Trinitarian Theology

P1. If we should apprehend the number of wills and operations according to the number of *hypostases*, then we would apprehend three wills and three operations in the case of the Trinity.

P2. But it is absurd to apprehend three personal wills and three personal operations in the Trinity. [Assumption from Canonical Logic: we should apprehend the number of wills and operations according to the number of natures.]

Therefore,

C. We should not apprehend the number of wills and operations according to the number of *hypostases*.

From passage [1] we learn that we are to count the number of natural wills, operations, etc. according to the number of natures (and not the number of *hypostases*). In the case of the Incarnation, there are two natures (divine and human), so there are two natural wills, operations, etc. In the case of the Trinity, there is numerically one divine nature, so there is just one natural will, operation, etc. to be apprehended. What is quite remarkable about [1] and [2] is that it adds clarification to what is found in Constantinople II; the unity is *numerical* unity.

Constantinople III uses this “canonical logic” for the Trinity and the Incarnation. This reflects the trend that Zachhuber pointed out. Around this time there was a pursuit for general understandings of ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis,’ and how these terms apply to the Trinity *and* the Incarnation.

There is another example in the conciliar documents of this canonical logic for the Trinity and Incarnation. In session 10, Pope Agatho’s representatives quote a passage from John

³¹ Riedinger (1990, 68, ln. 4-12 / 69, ln. 4-11). Translated by Percival (1988, 332-333).

Chrysostom, and argue from it.³² (The same argument is reported in session 4 from a quotation of John Chrysostom in Agatho's letter to the emperor.)³³ The argument can be constructed as follows; note that the phrase 'one will' (*mia bolesis; una uoluntas*) of the Father and the Son names a natural power (and not an act of will or a volition). I call this the "Argument from the Canonical Logic regarding the Trinity and Incarnation." This argument shows, again, that belief in the *numerically* one divine will is used to support the claim that Christ has *numerically* two wills (the one divine will, and a human will).

Argument from the Canonical Logic regarding the Trinity and Incarnation

P1: The Father and Son share numerically one divine will. [Assumption]

P2: If the incarnate Son says, "not my will, but your will," to the Father, then either the Son contradicts himself or he references his human will that is not shared with the Father.

P3: The incarnate Son says, "not my will, but your will," to the Father. [From Scripture]

Therefore,

P4: Either the Son contradicts himself (because [P1] the Son would only have numerically the same will as the Father but would be suggesting that he has a numerically different will from the Father), or he references his human will that is not shared with the Father. [2, 3 Modus Ponens]

P5: It is not the case that the Son contradicts himself. [Assumption]

Therefore,

C: The incarnate Son references his human will that is not shared with the Father. [P4, P5, Disjunctive Syllogism]

It is important to note that this argument does not understand P1 as being consistent with the claim that the Father and Son do not share numerically the same divine will but do share specifically the same divine will. The canonical logic undergirds P1, namely that the number of divine wills does not correlate to the number of divine *hypostases* but rather correlates to the number of divine natures. The Father and Son share numerically the same divine will because they share numerically the same divine nature.³⁴ So, this (reconstructed) argument shows that the council understands P1 as the claim that the divine *hypostases* share *numerically* the same divine will and not merely specifically the same divine will. And it shows the council using a canonical logic concerning the number of divine wills to argue for Christ's having two distinct wills.

³² See Riedinger (1990, 294 / 295).

³³ See Riedinger (1990, 84, ln. 25 / 85, ln. 24 - 86, ln. 6 / 87, ln. 5).

³⁴ For a slightly different argument for the same conclusion (that there is numerically one divine will), see Barnes (2002, 489–490) who discusses some passages from Gregory of Nazianzus.

Turning to Pope Agatho and the 125 bishops' *Letter to the Council*, we find the following statement of faith:

[3] We believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all
 2 things visible and invisible; and in his only-begotten Son, who was begotten of him
 3 before all worlds; true God from God, Light from Light, begotten not made, co-
 4 essential [*homoousion*] with the Father, that is of the very same essence [*ousias*] with
 5 the Father; through him were all things made which are in heaven and which are on
 6 earth; and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the
 7 Father, and with the Father and Son together is worshiped and glorified; the Trinity
 8 in unity and unity in the Trinity; a unity of essence [*ousias*] but a trinity of *prosopa* or
 9 *hypostases*; and so we confess God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit;
 10 not three gods, but one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; not a *hypostasis*
 11 of three names, but one essence of three *hypostases* [*trion hypostaseon mian ousian*], thus
 12 one essence and nature, that is to say one deity, one eternity, one power, one
 13 kingdom, one glory, one adoration, **one essential will and operation** of the same
 14 Holy and inseparable Trinity [*hen ousiodes tes autes agias kai akoristou triados thelema kai*
 15 *energeia*], which ha[s] created all things, ha[s] made disposition of them, and still
 16 contains them.³⁵

In lines 1-7 we find an echo of the creed of Nicaea and Constantinople I. Note that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Father.” It does not include the *filioque*-clause that is found in the Pseudo-Athanasian Creed. (I will return to this in the next section.) In lines 7-16 there is an exposition of lines 1-7 that starts at “the Trinity in unity and unity in the Trinity.” This exposition reflects the same canonical logic, as found in passages [1] and [2] above, where it says, “[O]ne deity, one eternity, one power, one kingdom, one glory, one adoration, *one essential will and operation* of the same Holy and inseparable Trinity [...]” (lines 12-14). Given the canonical logic about the number of will, power, operation, etc. from [1] and [2], we cannot interpret lines 12-14 in a way that is consistent with Severus of Antioch’s “particular natures.” Recall that in Severus's account, the number of powers and operations is the same as the number of *hypostases*. It is important to note that not only does Constantinople III reject Severus’s assertion of one composite operation and “one hypostatic will” [*hen thelma hypostatikon epi tou henos kuriou emon Iesou Christou kai theandriken autou ten energeian*] in the case of the incarnate Christ,³⁶ it also rejects his account of the number of powers, operations, etc. in general, and especially regarding the Trinity. (Put otherwise, it would reject the suggestion that the number of powers depends on the number of *hypostases*.) Whereas Severus holds that the number of powers and operations aligns with the number of *hypostases*, the council holds that the number of powers and operations aligns with the number of natures. (Put otherwise, the number of powers and operations depends on the number of natures.)

In [3] line 10, it says, “[N]ot three gods, but one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [...]” This rejection of “three gods” does not come out of nowhere. It is a specific response to the trend from miaphysite ontology. As Zachhuber pointed out, there was a direct line from Severus of Antioch’s ‘particular natures’ to John Ascouzanges who wrote, “I confess natures, substances, and divinities according to the number of *hypostases*,” and later to

³⁵ Riedinger (1990, 126, ln. 26 / 127, ln. 23 - 128, ln. 8. / 129, ln. 8). Translated by Percival (1988, 340), with slight modifications by me.

³⁶ Riedinger (1990, 216, ln. 24-25 / 217, ln. 23-24).

John Philoponus's arguing that the number of divine natures and powers correlates to the number of divine *hypostases*. Constantinople III's denial of "three gods" should be understood as a rejection of Severus's ontology of 'particular natures.' (I say more about this below.)

The phrase in [3] lines 7-8, "Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity," has (at least) two direct sources. In Agatho's *Letter to Emperor Constantine IV*, he commends Emperor Justinian's *Letter to Zoilus (Against the Monophysites)* to the council and he endorses it.³⁷ Moreover, the council quotes from Justinian's *Letter to Zoilus*³⁸ and from his *Edict on the Right Faith* in support of the council's claim that there are two wills in Christ. Further, the council praises and endorses Emperor Justinian for these theological texts. (Given this, I include Justinian's two theological texts as part of Conciliar Trinitarianism - though, if someone supposes that it isn't, that will not alter my argument that Constantinople III clarifies that the divine *hypostases* share *numerically* the same will, and *numerically* the same volitions.) In both of these theological texts Justinian focuses on the *numerical* identity of the divine essence or nature, in contrast to merely a specific unity or generic unity. This attention to numbering is likely what led Pope Agatho to endorse these texts by Justinian. The relevant passage regarding Trinitarian theology from Justinian's *Letter to Zoilus*, is as follows:

[4] The holy church of God teaches unity in trinity and trinity in unity. For, there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and one Holy Spirit in whom are all things – the phrases "from whom," "through whom," and "in whom" do not divide the nature, but characterize the properties of the one and simple nature. Since we consider the same essence in each *hypostasis*, we adore one essence in three *hypostases* [*mian gar ousian en trisin hypostasesi*], and we confess each *hypostasis* in the same way. But since we must count them, we do not indicate wild polytheism by this number. For, we do not number through a synthesis making an increase from one to a plurality. But when confessing the property of the *hypostases*, we preserve the monarchy by not extending our theology with a remote number. For, we confess one form in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit united by the identity of nature. Therefore, we confess each one God. If we consider the inseparable [*hypostases*] separately, [then] we think these three together are one God because of the identical motion and nature. Therefore, the three [*hypostases*] are truly three. Three is not a number of unequal things, but a comprehension of equal honor. Their name is one because they are united in nature, and by no means are they separated because they are counted separately.³⁹

By denying that the divine *hypostases* are divided from each other with regard to their one singular divine nature, Justinian is claiming that it is numerically the same divine *ousia* that the three divine *hypostases* share in common. It is important to note that Justinian is saying that it is numerically the same nature (or "form") that is "in" each of the divine *hypostases*. He denies that the number of divine *hypostases* "increase[s]" the number of divine natures. This is like the claim that Gregory of Nyssa makes in "Not Three Gods," where Gregory says:

³⁷ Riedinger (1990, 100, ln. 12-18 / 101, ln. 10-15).

³⁸ Riedinger (1990, 352, ln. 12 / 353, ln. 13 - 356, ln. 16 / 357, ln. 17).

³⁹ Justinian (1973, 6, ln. 26-39 / 7, ln. 23-36). The original Greek text is referenced on the left side of '/' and the original Latin text is referenced on the right side of '/'. Translated by me.

But through the perceived peculiarities, the topic of *hypostases* admits of distinction and is viewed in number according to combination. But the nature is one; it is united to itself, undivided, a precisely undivided unit, not increased through addition, not decreased through subtraction, but being one and remaining one, even if it would appear in a multitude, undivided, continuous, perfect, and not divided by those who individually share it.⁴⁰

This passage is best interpreted as asserting that the divine nature is *distributed* in each divine *hypostasis* such that it is not numerically increased (divided) for each divine *hypostasis*. If the divine nature were a totality or collection of 'particular natures,' then it would be divided into each divine *hypostasis*. But Gregory denies that the divine nature is numerically divided into particular natures. So, the divine nature is not a unique collection of 'particular natures.' Similarly, Justinian claims that the *one* divine nature is not "increase[d]" by adding up the divine *hypostases*. In effect, Justinian is denying Severus of Antioch's 'particular natures,' according to which the number of divine natures correlates to (or depends on) the number of divine *hypostases*.

The relevant passage from Justinian's *Edict on Right Faith* regarding the Trinity is as follows:

[5] We confess, therefore, to believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, a co-essential trinity [*triada homoousion*], adoring one deity or nature and essence and power and dominion in three *hypostases* or *prosopa* [*en trisin hypostasesin etoi prosopois*], in whom we are baptized, in whom we believe, and to whom we give confession - the properties indeed separating, but the deity uniting. For we adore the unity in trinity and the trinity in unity, being marvelous both in division and union; unity according to the principle of the essence or deity, but trinity according to the properties or *hypostases* or *prosopa*. ([The trinity] is divided indivisibly, as we say, and is conjoined dividedly. For one is the deity in three and the three are one, in whom is the deity, or as we say more subtly, the very three is the deity.) Each is God; each *hypostasis* is understood alone by the mind separating what is inseparable. And the three are one God, since they are understood together on account of the same movement and nature, seeing that it is necessary also that one God is confessed and three *hypostases* or three *prosopa* are preached, and each one with their own property. And, when confessing the unity we do not make a confusion according to Sabellius saying that the one trinity is a *prosopon* by three names, the same [*prosopon*] being the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; nor when dividing the properties do we alienate the Son or Holy Spirit from the essence of the Father according to the fury of Arius cutting the deity into three diverse natures. Therefore, there is one God, the Father from whom are all things, and one is the only begotten Son through whom are all things, and one is the Holy Spirit in whom are all things.⁴¹

In these passages Justinian claims that the shared divine *ousia* or *phusis* is inseparably united in each of the divine *hypostases*. This fits with Gregory of Nyssa's stipulation that an *ousia* only exists in *hypostases*. Furthermore, the claim that the Trinity is "divided indivisibly, [...] and conjoined dividedly," which likely derives from Gregory of Nyssa's so-called *Letter 38*,⁴² should

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa (1986, 151).

⁴¹ Justinian (1973, 130, ln. 13-28 / 131, ln. 11-28). Translated by me.

⁴² See Basil of Caesarea (1957, 87, ln. 87-91).

be understood as inchoately expressing the following existence conditions. (1) The one divine essence cannot exist without being united in each divine *hypostasis*. (2) Each divine *hypostasis* cannot exist without being united to the one divine essence. And (3) the one divine essence is not (strictly) identical to each divine *hypostasis*. Furthermore, Justinian stipulates that (4) identically the same *ousia* is not numerically multiplied in its inseparable union in three divine *hypostases*. This is what “divided indivisibly, [...] and conjoined dividedly” amounts to, for Justinian and Constantinople III (among others). His talk of our being able to “separate” the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit only in our minds is the epistemic correlate of his ontological claim that what makes the Father God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God, is *numerically* the same entity - the Father’s divine *ousia* or *phusis*.

In session eleven of Constantinople III Pope Agatho’s representatives asked the emperor, Constantine IV, whether they would read aloud the entire *Synodical Letter* by Sophronius of Jerusalem, and whether the council would judge it to be orthodox. (Sophronius was the teacher of Maximus the Confessor.) They reported to the emperor that Pope Agatho accepts and endorses this synodical letter, and they suggested that the emperor would find the letter pleasing. After they are given permission, they read aloud the entire *Synodical Letter* (which is about 42 pages in the critical edition of the Acts of the council).⁴³ This fact is reported in Pauline Allen’s excellent edition of this letter.⁴⁴ Allen’s edition and translation (in 2009) is the first complete translation of this letter in a modern language. However, another important fact, which is not included in Allen’s edition of Sophronius’s letter nor in summaries of the council in secondary literature, is that in the thirteenth session Constantinople III solemnly endorsed this synodical letter, saying:

[6] We have examined the synodical letter of Sophronius of holy memory, some time Patriarch of the Holy City of Christ our God, Jerusalem, and have found it in accordance with the true faith and with the Apostolic teachings, and with those of the holy approved Fathers. Therefore, we have received it as orthodox and as salutary to the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and have decreed that it is right that his name be inserted in the diptychs of the Holy Churches.⁴⁵

Just as previous ecumenical councils endorsed specific letters, such as when Ephesus I endorsed Cyril of Alexandria’s letter to Nestorius, and Chalcedon endorsed Pope Leo’s *Tome* that was written to Flavius, here Constantinople III endorses Sophronius’s *Synodical Letter* and proclaims that Sophronius is to be commemorated in the churches.

Sophronius of Jerusalem wrote his *Synodical Letter* around 634ce after becoming Patriarch of Jerusalem. The letter has the following structure: (1) a long greeting to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, (2) a section on the (immanent) Trinity, (3) a section on Christology, (4) a section on creation, (5) a section on ecumenical councils, (6) a very detailed section on heretics and heresies, and (7) concluding remarks. The section on the Trinity is clearly influenced by the creed from Constantinople I, Gregory Nazianzus’s *Oration 39*, and Emperor Justinian’s *Edict On the Right Faith*. What is particularly relevant from these influences, for my purposes here, is the attention that is paid to ontological counting. (How many X’s are there? How many essences or natures? How many *hypostases*?) In [4] and [5] Justinian articulates how we should count the numerically one divine nature and how that numbering relates to the divine *hypostases*.

⁴³ See Riedinger (1990, 410-494).

⁴⁴ Allen (2009, 63).

⁴⁵ Percival (1998, 343). See Riedinger (1992, 580, ln. 8-14 / 581, ln. 7-12).

The same rules are found in the passage from Gregory of Nyssa's "Not Three Gods." Likewise, Sophronius is explicit about the number essences and *hypostases*, and is more extensive in his discussion than Justinian was. Sophronius denies that the divine *ousia* is partitioned or numbered into three and he denies that the divine *hypostases* are only specifically but not numerically the same divine nature. His discussion not only reflects the emergence of Severus's 'particular natures,' and John Ascouzanges and John Philoponus's "three divinities," but also the miaphysite anti-tritheist backlash, which Sophronius calls "minor tritheism" in the heresiology in his letter.⁴⁶

I include a large portion of Sophronius's discussion of the Trinity in order to show how articulate he is on various issues, and to show (some of) what Constantinople III endorsed as "orthodox and salutary to the Catholic and Apostolic church." In speaking of the (immanent) Trinity, Sophronius writes:

[7] [...]. I believe in a Trinity that is consubstantial, and of the same honour and of the same throne, sharing nature, sharing kinship, and of the same stock, in one consummate deity and in one united common lordship without confusion of person, and with no contraction of *hypostasis*. For we believe in a Trinity in unity, and we glorify unity in trinity, a Trinity in the three *hypostases* and a unity in the singleness of the deity; for the holy Trinity has number in the *hypostases* of persons, whereas the all-holy unity is wholly without number, and has an indivisible division and sustains an unconfused conjunction. For while it is divided in its numerable *hypostases* and numbered in the differences of its persons, it is united in the identity of its essence and its nature, and does not admit of complete partition. The unity is both unitary and unaggregate and shuns all numeration according to essence. For we believe in one God unshakably, because both one deity is manifestly proclaimed, although it is acknowledged in a trinity of persons, and one Lord is announced to us, because one lordship too is firmly discerned, although it is shown forth in three *hypostases*.

Neither is God, as one God and one deity, divided and partitioned into three gods or drawn out into three deities; nor is the Lord, as one Lord, separated and extended into three lords or widened into three lordships.⁴⁷ (The Arians' impiety divides the one God into unequal gods and partitions the one deity into three heterogeneous lordships.) Nor as the one God is a Trinity and is recognized and proclaimed as three *hypostases* and worshipped as three *prosopa*, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is he said to be contracted or compounded or confused, that is, by coalescing himself into one *hypostasis* and combining [himself] into one *prosopon* that cannot be numbered. (The unlawful view of Sabellians confuses the three *hypostases* into one *hypostasis* and mixes up the three *prosopa* into one *prosopon*.) For where is the Trinity, you most impious people, if according to you, the Trinity is assembled in one *prosopon* and comes together into one confused *hypostasis*? Or where is the unity, you maddest of men, if the unity is drawn out into three essences and widened into three natures and multiplied into three deities? For with the orthodox each of these is impious and drifts wholly astray from pious belief, whether unitarian in respect of *hypostasis* or triadic in the natures. The former is carried off directly into Judaism and carries off the speaker with it, the latter rolls aside towards paganism and rolls the exponent away

⁴⁶ Allen (2009, 143).

⁴⁷ Allen references Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 39*, 11, as a source for these claims.

with it. And either the one who asserts the latter madly with Arius is a thoroughgoing pagan, or the one who impiously accepts the former with Sabellius is a Judaizer.

On this account it has been well decreed by the theologians that we should think of the unity in one single deity and in the identity of essential and natural lordship, but of the Trinity in three unconfused *hypostases* and in the difference of the threefold distinction of *prosopa*, so that neither should the one await Sabellius by being perceived as wholly one and shunning all plurality of *hypostasis*, nor should the three make Arius vain by being conceived through and through as three while repudiating every unitarian expression of the deity and essence and nature. As, therefore, we have been taught to think of one God, so too have we received the tradition of confessing one deity; and just as we have learned to worship three *hypostases*, so too have we been instructed to glorify three *prosopa*, nor understanding the three co-essential *prosopa* in the Trinity - that is, Father, Son, Holy Spirit - as being distinct from the one God. This is why we proclaim as one the three in whom the deity is, and we announce as one the three of whom is the deity; or, to speak more accurately and more clearly, the three whom the deity is and as whom it is recognized. For the same thing is both numerable and shuns numeration: it is numerable in its triple *hypostases*, but shuns numeration in the singularity of the deity, in that the singularity of its essence and nature is utterly intolerant of being numbered, in order that one may neither introduce a difference of deity and, further, of essence and nature, or render the monarchy as a polytheism. For all number possesses difference as a corollary, and all difference and distinction brings with it an associated number.

Hence, the blessed Trinity is not numbered in essences and natures and different godheads or triple lordships (heaven forbid!), as the Arians assert in their madness, and the leaders of the new tritheism maintain in their fury, when they babble about three essences and three natures and three lordships and likewise three deities, but [it is numbered] in *hypostases* and perfect intellectual properties, subsisting by themselves, divisible in number and indivisible in deity. This is because the all-holy Trinity is divided indivisibly and is joined together again dividedly. Although it possesses divisibility in *prosopa*, it remains indivisible and unsevered in essence and in nature and likewise also in deity. Because of this we neither speak of three gods, nor do we glorify three natures in the Trinity, nor do we proclaim three essences in it, nor do we confess three godheads, whether co-essential or of another essence, whether of the same kind or of another kind, nor do we permit what is proclaimed in regard to it as a unity to be drawn out into a multiplicity, or allow anyone to divide its unity. Nor do we understand any kind of three gods or know any three natures or any three essences or any three deities, whether homogeneous or heterogeneous, whether of the same stock or of another stock; but neither have we at all recognized gods or natures or essences or godheads or know those who recognize them, but rather strike with anathemas the one who accepts or thinks or recognizes such. For we know one principle of the deity, one kingship, one authority, one power, one activity, one intent, one will, one dominion, one movement - whether creating all that exists after it, be it providing or sustaining or preserving-one lordship, one eternity, and whatever else of the one essence and nature in three personal *hypostases* is unitary and unaggregate. Neither do we confuse the *hypostases* and reduce them to one *hypostasis*, nor do we portion the one essence and separate it into three essences and so divide the one deity.

But there is one God, one deity shining forth in three *hypostases*, and three *hypostases* and *prosopa* revealed in one deity.⁴⁸

Sophronius denies that the divine *ousia* can be numerically divided. He uses Justinian's language in saying, "[...] the all-holy Trinity is divided indivisibly and is joined together again dividedly." Put otherwise, there can't be numerically distinct instances of, or non-identical instances of, the one divine essence, one divine power, one divine activity, one divine intent, one divine will, one divine movement, etc. He denies that the number of (e.g.) divine powers correlates to (or depends on) the number of divine *hypostases*; and he affirms that the number of (e.g.) divine powers correlates to (or depends on) the number of divine essences and natures. Since there is just one divine essence and nature, it follows that there is just (e.g.) one divine power, one divine will, etc. This is the "canonical logic" that was endorsed by Constantinople III. Moreover, Sophronius's denial of "three divinities" is repeated in Pope Agatho and the 125 Bishops' *Letter to the Council* (see [3], lines 9-13). Later in the *Synodical Letter*, Sophronius includes John Philoponus as a heretic in his detailed discussion of heresiology because John posited "three divinities."

Given that Agatho and the 125 bishops used this canonical logic for an explication of the Trinity and as (partial) justification for ascribing two wills in Christ, it makes sense why Pope Agatho would ask the council to judge the orthodoxy of Sophronius's *Synodical Letter*. Even though Trinitarian theology wasn't the *target issue* to be discussed in Constantinople III, it was clearly a relevant issue because of prominent miaphysite ontology regarding the Trinity and Incarnation. Constantinople III endorses a Trinitarian theology and a Christology because it is responding to a miaphysite Trinitarian theology and Christology. While the debate over the number of wills in Christ was a significant *explanandum* (or, a mystery to be clarified), the Trinitarian theology was a key part of the *explanans* (or, what was used to help clarify the mystery).

Consider one last example of the Trinitarian theology and the canonical logic that was applied to the Incarnation. Emperor Constantine IV presided over sessions one through eleven, and then returned in session eighteen when the final conciliar judgments were made. After the council was over, he issued an imperial edict that shared the news about the council's theological judgments. Although his edict itself is not a part of "Conciliar Trinitarianism" as I've defined it, his edict reflects his own understanding of what was said in the council. As it happens, his understanding corroborates what I have argued for regarding the application of "canonical logic" to Trinitarian theology and to Christology. In the following excerpt from his (long) edict, Constantine IV discusses the Trinity. (This is the first modern translation of this passage, of which I am aware.) What he says restates the ontology of the Trinity and the canonical logic that I've reported from Pope Agatho, Emperor Justinian, and Sophronius of Jerusalem:

We believe in the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, trinity in unity and unity in trinity, one essence in three *hypostases*. Indeed, the unity is because of the one nature [*monada men dia ten phusiken henoteta*] and dominion, but a trinity because of the perfection of the three *hypostases* and the divinity of the super-existent goodness. Indeed, the unity truly is a trinity, since what is united is by deity, and the trinity truly is a unity with divided properties and not dispersed with regard to eternity. [The trinity] is also coeternal to itself, and the essence is of equal honor. For there is no time when there

⁴⁸ Allen (2009, 75-83); translated by Pauline Allen.

was no Son with the Father, of whom he is called Father [...]. Nor was there a time when the Holy Spirit was without [the Father and Son]. Therefore, these three are one God, since they are understood in turn, by discerning inseparably each person only by each difference in the community of the essence. For, the Father alone is the Father, the Son alone is the Son, the Holy Spirit alone is the Holy Spirit. They are not turned into each other because of these differences, but [being] in [the *hypostases*], on the one hand, [the *hypostases*] are “inseparably divided,” and on the other hand, [the *hypostases*] share in the unity of the essence. And the trinity is simple and unpartitioned and incomposite from the three perfect [ones], [and the trinity] in itself is perfect and even super-perfect, and is to be glorified in one nature and one deity, and one will, and one operation. This is as blessed Basil taught us, “therefore, of whom one is the nature, of these also one is the will and operation.”⁴⁹

In the subsequent paragraphs Constantine IV discusses and summarizes the council's arguments for the claim that there are two wills in Christ. He quotes from the same authoritative passages that the council did (from (e.g.) Cyril of Alexandria, (Ps.)-Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Pope Leo, and Chalcedon), and he gives what I called the *Argument from the Canonical Logic regarding the Trinity and Incarnation*.⁵⁰

I have already shown that one motivation for the Trinitarian theology in the council was that it was used to argue for specific claims about Christ. The canonical logic did just that. But more can and should be said. As Zachhuber has shown, from the 400s to the 600s many theologians engaged in debate about how the Cappadocian terms ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis’ could apply to the Trinity and the Incarnation. Gregory of Nyssa had stipulated that an *ousia* only exists in all of (the relevant) *hypostases*. Miaphysites like Severus of Antioch interpreted Gregory as saying that an *ousia* is (identical to, or consists in) a collection of (co-specific) *hypostases*, that is, ‘particular natures.’ This allowed for Severus to understand the incarnation in the following way: only God the Son's particular divine *ousia* became a particular composite essence. For Severus, we should predicate deity and human nature of the Son, but he denied there are two ‘things’ in Christ. Hence, Christ is one particular composite nature.

But many neo-Chalcedonians interpreted Gregory's stipulated existence condition for *ousia* not in a collective way but in a distributive way. This meant that numerically the same *ousia* exists ‘in’ each (co-specific) *hypostasis*. Philosophers call this sort of universal an “immanent universal.” In this distributive interpretation of Gregory's claim that an *ousia* only exists ‘in’ *hypostases*, a *hypostasis* is a unique collection of an immanent universal plus distinguishing properties (what might, loosely, be called accidental (or personal) properties). The divine *hypostases* share numerically the same divine *ousia*, but they don't share distinguishing properties (called *idiomata*). A challenge for this interpretation of Gregory's existence condition for an *ousia* is how it applies to the Incarnation. The challenge is that *hypostasis* is what is individual, but Christ somehow was united to an individual human nature that was not itself a *hypostasis*. (Miaphysites like Severus worried that to say that Christ assumed human nature meant that Christ was hypostatically united to all human beings.) So, neo-Chalcedonians needed to revise their account of *hypostasis*. Instead of saying that a *hypostasis* is what is individual, (e.g.) Leontius of Byzantium claimed that a *hypostasis* is “what exists in itself and not in something else,” and secondly, it is not a part of something else that exists in itself.⁵¹ This way of describing a

⁴⁹ Riedinger (1992, 836, ln. 18 / 837, ln. 18 - 838, ln. 9 / 839, ln. 10). Translated by me.

⁵⁰ Riedinger (1992, 842, ln. 23 / 843, ln. 23 - 844, ln. 23 / 845, ln. 24).

⁵¹ See Williams (2019, 73-76).

hypostasis makes it such that God the Son, a *hypostasis*, could consist of the immanent singular divine nature, plus the attribute of *being (eternally) begotten from the Father*, and could consist of the immanent (singular) human nature, plus distinguishing properties like *being the Son of Mary*. All of these things exist "in" God the Son. Given this ontological account of the Incarnation, we can say that Christ has his own human nature (thanks to individuating properties like *being the Son of Mary*) and he shares our specific human nature. Moreover, this ontology of the incarnation fits with the "canonical logic" that was used and affirmed by Constantinople III. Since on Leontius's account Christ has a human nature, it follows that Christ has a human will and human activities. And, since there is one divine nature in Christ, it follows that Christ has the one divine will and (performs) divine activities. Hence, there are two wills in Christ.

One important reason why the Trinitarian theology of Constantinople III has been overlooked is that it was not the predominant target issue of the council. It wasn't the issue that demanded an answer from the council because there were no advocates for (e.g.) "three divinities" at the council. Instead there were some advocates for claiming that Christ has "one composite will" - a "theandric will." Nonetheless, by looking closely at the arguments given in support of the council's judgement that there are two wills in Christ, we find appeals to Trinitarian theology and the "canonical logic" that was used again and again during the council. We find Trinitarian theology not only in the arguments but also in the official statements of faith. Once we notice all this, we discover that Constantinople III made clarifications regarding Trinitarian theology. These clarifications regarding the Trinity and the Incarnation were in response to miaphysite Trinitarian theology and miaphysite Christology (e.g., Severus of Antioch, John Philoponus). Thus, it is fair to say that the council answered questions about the Trinity *and* the Incarnation.

4. Constantinople III and the Pseudo-Athanasian Creed

Some philosophers of religion use the Pseudo-Athanasian creed as a key source for theorizing about the Trinity. It is treated as the text that requires metaphysical explication, and if the theorizing is internally coherent and consistent with Scripture, then that is taken to be sufficient for theorizing about the Trinity. But with this discovery of Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology, that practice is undermined (at least for those who take these ecumenical councils as having some evidential weight) because now there is a more authoritative articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. So, it is significant to compare the Trinitarian theology from Constantinople III and the Pseudo-Athanasian creed.

First, it is important to point out that the Pseudo-Athanasian creed reflects the theological culture, identified by Zachhuber, in which there were detailed discussions and debates about the divine *ousia* and three divine *hypostases*, and, the Pseudo-Athanasian creed articulates the Trinitarian doctrine before it speaks of Christology as such. Second, the theological content in the Pseudo-Athanasian creed to a certain extent overlaps with the Trinitarian theology of Constantinople III, but as I discuss below, there are important differences. Third, the Pseudo-Athanasian creed itself does not have the same theological authority as ecumenical councils do, at least for those who take the ecumenical councils to be (to some extent) authoritative. Nonetheless, contemporary philosophical theologians are often tempted to treat the Pseudo-Athanasian Creed as the core text that concisely articulates Trinitarian doctrine or statements. But now that we have Constantinople III's statement of faith in [3] above, which includes Trinitarian theology, philosophical theologians might consider focusing more on

Constantinople III and less on the Pseudo-Athanasian creed, given that the former has significantly more ecumenical authority.

Historians (e.g., J.N.D. Kelly) have judged that the Pseudo-Athanasian creed originates from a western Latin context and not from an eastern Greek context.⁵² We do not know who wrote this creed, nor is there a consensus on the best guess about who wrote it. Historians have tended to focus on the doctrinal content of the creed in order to try to place it within a theological culture. At present, historians suspect that it is from the mid-400s to the early-500s. The creed is succinct in its Trinitarian content and it is fairly abstract. These two attributes fit with the theological culture that Zachhuber has surveyed. By comparing the statements from this creed with the Trinitarian documents endorsed by Constantinople III, it seems to me that the creed reflects a pre-Constantinople II theology. For, the creed does not mention, or allude to, whether there is one or two kinds of *activity* from Christ. And it does not assert that there are “two natures *in*” Christ (as we find in, for example Pope Leo’s *Tome*). It says that Christ is “God and human,” and says that the Son of God is “God from the substance [*substantia*] of the Father, and human from the substance [*substantia*] of his mother.” The Christology of this creed is consistent with miaphysite Christology *and* with Chalcedonian Christology. For, miaphysites like Severus of Antioch agree that the concept of deity and the concept of humanity are each predicated of Christ.

Regarding the creed’s Trinitarian theology, it denies that there are “three Gods,” and affirms that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. This is consistent with what those miaphysites like Peter of Callinicum said about the Trinity, in their criticism of the “tri-theism” of John Philoponus, and it is consistent with what is said in Constantinople II and III. The creed affirms that there is “one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity,” which is an expression found in documents endorsed by Constantinople III. Further, the creed affirms that the “deity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.” When comparing this statement to the “canonical logic” of Constantinople III we find that the statement is not as explicit as Constantinople III. For, the statement (“deity of . . . is one”) is consistent with Severus of Antioch’s Trinitarian theology (according to whom the one deity is the collection or totality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it’s a singular concrete collection or class), and it is consistent with some of Severus’s neo-Chalcedonian opponents (according to whom there is numerically one deity that is inseparably united in each divine *hypostasis*; it’s an immanent universal).

Lastly, the Pseudo-Athanasian creed asserts that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and Son.” In contrast to Nicaea I, Constantinople I, and Constantinople III, which claims that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father,” the creed adds the “filioque” clause (*and from the Son*). This has been one of the reasons that Greek theologians reject the Pseudo-Athanasian creed. Furthermore, by comparing the Trinitarian theology in the creed with Constantinople III’s Trinitarian theology, we see further reasons that may give one pause if one is trying to do or learn Conciliar Trinitarianism. The Pseudo-Athanasian creed is not as detailed as Constantinople III, given that it is ambiguous between different ways of interpreting the unity of the deity. As is evident from the last few decades in contemporary analytic theology and philosophy of religion, scholars have debated over this ambiguity. Some go in the direction of miaphysite ontology (as I discuss in the next section), and others go in the direction of Constantinople III’s ontology. But now that we have the Trinitarian theology of Constantinople III, philosophers of religion or philosophical theologians are better situated to articulate a model of the Trinity that is consistent with a more clearly articulated, conciliar

⁵² See Kelly (1964, 112-114); Kwon (2010, 116-119).

Trinitarianism (assuming they wish to develop a model of the Trinity that is consistent with conciliar Christian theology).

5. Some Historical and Theological Implications

There are (at least) two implications from the foregoing account of Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology. The first has to do with the historiography of Trinitarian theology, and the second has to do with how (contemporary) models of the Trinity compare to the Trinitarian theology of Constantinople III. Here I focus on one implication for historiography. In contemporary systematic theology, philosophy of religion, and some Roman Catholic textbooks, there is a standard narrative (dating back at least to De Regnon's influence in the 19th century) that the Trinitarian theology as found in the Greek east and as found in the Latin west have different starting points or emphases, and in turn different models of the Trinity.⁵³ It has been said that Greek theology was, or was friendly to, what has been called a Social model of the Trinity. Some theologians or philosophers of religion have attempted to justify this by interpreting e.g., Gregory of Nyssa or Basil of Caesarea, in a "pro-social" manner. By "pro-social" I mean texts that (are interpreted to) claim things that *imply* a social model of the Trinity. This can be found in scholars ranging from John Zizoulas,⁵⁴ Jürgen Moltmann,⁵⁵ Richard Swinburne,⁵⁶ and William Hasker.⁵⁷ Further, it has been said that Latin theology starts with the unity of God, that is, numerically one divine nature, and then accounted for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the one divine nature's different modes of being, or claiming that the divine persons are 'subsisting relations' and not full persons in the modern sense of person. (For example, the latter model of the Trinity has been associated with Latin theology, e.g., Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus.) Some call this the Roman Catholic account of the Trinity. But this description reinforces the belief that the Latin west is the tradition that advocates for a non-social model of the Trinity because of the numerical unity of the divine nature.

However, other scholars (e.g., Michel Barnes, Lewis Ayers, Richard Cross) have attempted to undermine this general historical narrative by arguing that the Greek theologians in question really were closer to what the Latin theologians had held,⁵⁸ even arguing that there was not much difference between the ontology of Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo with regard to the Trinity. These closer historical studies of the Trinitarian theologies of (e.g.) Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine, are persuasive. Nevertheless, some philosophers of religion or systematic theologians continue to insist on finding (or stipulating) authoritative historical precedent for some version of a Social model of the Trinity.⁵⁹

But with this discovery about Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology, the grand narrative of the history of Trinitarian theology must change. The standard narrative is that western Latin theology holds to a non-social model of the Trinity, and the eastern Greek theology holds to

⁵³ For discussion of this complicated history, see Hennessy (2007).

⁵⁴ Zizoulas (1997).

⁵⁵ Moltmann (1993).

⁵⁶ Swinburne (1994, 170-191).

⁵⁷ Hasker (2013) 19-25.

⁵⁸ See Cross (2002, 275-294); Barnes (2002, 475-496). See also Hasker's discussion of Ayres and Barnes historical work in Hasker (2013, 62-67).

⁵⁹ See Van Den Brink (2014, 331-350).

a pro-social model of the Trinity. The contrast between a Greek theology and a Latin theology is undermined by the fact that Pope Agatho and two-thirds of the bishops of the 125 bishops at the synod in 679ce (which wrote a letter to the sixth ecumenical council) were Greek speaking and were a part of Byzantine settlements in Italy. Andrew Ekonomou puts it like this:

Nowhere was the proliferation of Easterners into Roman institutions more apparent than in the clergy of the church of Rome. Over half of the fifteen bishops who attended a synod convened in the Constantinian basilica adjacent to the Lateran patriarchy by the Greco-Sicilian Pope Agatho in 679 were Easterners, while the same was true of two-thirds of the priests in attendance. The appearance of a proportionately greater number of Greek in relation to Latin names among the ranks of the Roman clergy, as revealed in the identities of those who attended the synod in 679, indicates in a very tangible way the onset of the period during which the church of Rome would begin to encounter most profoundly the impact of the East.⁶⁰

Furthermore, when surveying which theologians were quoted during the fourth, ninth, and tenth sessions of Constantinople III, it becomes evident that Greek sources vastly outnumbered Latin sources, namely 50 times compared to 11 times. Here is a list of who was quoted and how many times from most to least: Cyril of Alexandria (19 times), Gregory of Nyssa (10 times), John Chrysostom (8 times), Pope Leo (6 times), Athanasius (4 times), Ambrose (3 times), Emperor Justinian (3 times), Ephrem of Antioch (2 times), Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (1 time), Epiphanius of Constantinople (1 time), Augustine of Hippo (1 time), Justin Martyr (1 time), Anastasia of Antioch (1 time), Sophronius of Jerusalem (his entire *Synodical Letter*) and John of Scythopolis (1 time). The historical evidence shows that Greek theological sources, and not Latin theological sources, were predominately used by Constantinople III in support of the assertion that the number of divine will-powers and volitions correlates to (or depends on) the number of divine natures and not the number of divine *hypostases*.

What does all this imply for contemporary models of the Trinity? If contemporary advocates of a social model of the Trinity desire to appeal to ancient theological sources for their model, they would have more success if they appealed to the miaphysite theological tradition. But, if so, then they would need to consider whether Constantinople III has any evidential weight against their model of the Trinity, given that a collectivist Trinity (with three 'particular natures,' 'personal wills,' and 'personal operations') is inconsistent with the sixth ecumenical council's judgment.

Some philosophers of religion, however, may suppose that their pro-Social interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa's texts has argumentative force. For example, William Hasker considers Gregory of Nyssa's letter to Ablabius, "On Not Saying Three Gods." There is a passage where Gregory says that the Father gives to the Son the authority to judge human beings. Hasker infers from such a statement that Gregory implies that the Father and Son each have their own numerically distinct (unshared) divine will and personal volitions. He justifies this inference by the following *modus tollens* argument. If the Father and the Son share numerically the same divine volitions, then the Father cannot perform an action that the Son does not also perform. But, the Father performs an action that the Son does not perform. Therefore, the Father and the Son do not share numerically the same divine volitions.

⁶⁰ Ekonomou (2009, 212-213).

In response, I have argued against Hasker's argument, and against Hasker's overall interpretation of Gregory's letter to Ablabius.⁶¹ Hasker interprets Gregory as positing that we should count the number of divine powers and volitions by the number of divine *hypostases*. And I argued against this counting rule by means of close readings of Gregory's letter to Ablabius and by corroborating this interpretation with other texts by Gregory (e.g., Gregory's *Antirrethichus*). (The passage that I appealed to is from Gregory of Nyssa's *Antirrethichus* that is also used by Constantinople III to justify the council's claim that the number of wills, powers, activities correlates to (or depends on) the number of natures and *not* the number of *hypostases*. Pope Agatho quotes this passage from Gregory's *Antirrethichus* in the *Letter to Emperor Constantine IV*.)⁶² Furthermore, the way that Hasker interprets Gregory is consistent with (and is nearly the same as) the way that Severus of Antioch and other miaphysites interpreted Gregory. They contend that the divine *ousia* is predicated of each divine *hypostasis*, and that the divine *hypostases* perform the same kinds of divine activities but not numerically the same divine activities. They say that the number of divine activities correlates to the number of divine *hypostases* and not to the singular divine *ousia*. Even more, they take words like 'God' in a collective sense. Hasker says that "the use of 'God' to designate the Trinity is in some sense the metaphysical 'bottom line' for trinitarian theology," and "'God' is used to refer to the Trinity as a whole."⁶³ Moreover, when interpreting the Pseudo-Athanasian creed, Hasker says that although we should *not say* that there are "three eternal, three almighty beings" etc., nonetheless there are "three eternal, three almighty beings."⁶⁴

But with Constantinople III, we now know that Hasker and Severus's interpretation(s) of Gregory is not only questionable or debatable insofar as historical exegesis of Gregory's own texts, but also that the collectivist interpretation is rejected by an official conciliar judgment. That is, Constantinople III rules out models of the Trinity like Severus of Antioch's model and Hasker's model according to which the divine *hypostases* do not share numerically the same divine activities - even if they do sometimes share (merely) specifically the same kinds of activities.

In contemporary analytic theology of the Trinity, a common argument for a social model of the Trinity is what I have called the "Argument from the Essential Indexical 'I'."⁶⁵ The basic idea is that each divine person has their own unshared psychological perspective. For Hasker (and other social trinitarians) what best explains this (purported) fact about the divine persons, is that each divine person has their own unshared divine will, intellect, operations, etc. But for Brian Leftow, what best explains this (purported) fact, given other claims about the unity of God, is that God (the one divine nature) eternally generates three different unshared conscious lives. There is one divine intellectual power, namely God's, but God (eternally) brings about three intellectual streams of consciousness.⁶⁶ A divine person is one of God's streams of consciousness. In a nutshell, for Leftow, there is numerically one divine will and one divine intellect, because there is just one God; and we should count the number of conscious acts (intellectual acts, acts of will) according to the number of divine persons. In Hasker's account and Leftow's account, each divine person could, so to speak, get away with thinking any proposition or willing anything, without the other divine persons as such doing

⁶¹ Williams (2022).

⁶² Riedinger (1990, 84, ln. 13-23 / 85, ln. 12-22).

⁶³ See Hasker (2013, 249).

⁶⁴ Hasker (2013, 249-254).

⁶⁵ Williams (2017, 336-339).

⁶⁶ Leftow (2007, 367).

so. This is the case, on these models, because the divine persons do not and cannot share numerically the same acts of thought or acts of volition. Consequently, Hasker's social model and Leftow's non-social model are each inconsistent with Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology because each affirms what the council denies, namely that there are "personal wills or personal operations."

However, more needs to be said about what Constantinople III doesn't discuss. It doesn't discuss "I" statements that pertain only to the Trinity and not to the Incarnation. In its discussions of the Incarnation, the council engages with Jesus's statements like, "I and the Father are one." It does not consider the (supposed) fact that there is some unique entity that is called a first-person perspective or first-person act (or what Dale Tuggy has called a "self").⁶⁷ Rather, it focuses on ontological implications of such statements for the number of essences, natures, wills, operations, etc. While there might be *truths* about the divine *hypostases'* first-person thoughts, it remains to be seen if there are such truths then whether these truths are grounded in (made true by) the conjunction of something unshared *and* something shared. (For such a proposal, see the discussion below of my Conciliar Social model of the Trinity (formerly called a Latin Social model).)

(One reason the council may not have considered first-person statements as requiring non-reductive ontological grounds for a first-person perspective may be found from a survey of Byzantine theories of *hypostasis*. Byzantine accounts of *hypostasis* do not insert rationality into their account of a *hypostasis* as such. So, there is little temptation to infer immediately from one's being a *hypostasis* to one's having a first-person perspective that is irreducible to non-first-person facts. The various powers (e.g., intellect and will) are grounded in the divine essence or nature, and not in the *hypostases* as such. It is only with Boethius and the Boethian tradition that we find rationality added to the definition of *persona*. But even in Latin western theology, rationality played almost no role in the debate over the concept of a person; though, it did, of course, play a role in discussion of human beings.)⁶⁸

Constantinople III interprets a statement like "I and the Father are one," as indicating that Jesus and God the Father share numerically the same divine nature and divine will. (The council's quotations from e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, supported this approach.) Consequently, if a theologian has strong reason to ascribe to each divine *hypostasis* an ontologically unshared first-person perspective, what then? One may be tempted to go Hasker's route (by positing one unshared power and one unshared act for each divine *hypostasis*) or Leftow's route (by positing one power shared by all divine *hypostasis*, and one unshared act for each divine *hypostasis*). On each account, a first-person perspective or fact, is not explained in terms of something more basic.

But there are other options. Some may settle with metaphors or with apophaticism on this question. But others may attempt an ontological exploration to show whether a consistent account can be articulated. Elsewhere I have attempted just such an ontological exploration by giving an account of the ontological grounds for what is called a first-person perspective, and which is consistent with Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology (Williams, 2022). On my proposed model of the Trinity, a first-person perspective is grounded in the conjunction of something shared *and* something unshared (that is unshareable) among the divine *hypostases*. On this account, the divine *hypostases* share numerically the same use of a divine mental sentence (e.g., 'I am God') but in sharing this use of this mental sentence each divine *hypostasis* is aware of a different proposition. The Father is aware that they themselves (singular 'they') are

⁶⁷ See Tuggy (2020).

⁶⁸ See Williams (2019, 52-84); Williams (2020, 80-102).

God, the Son is aware that they themselves are God, and the Holy Spirit is aware that they themselves are God. Indexical terms like 'I' are context dependent for their referent. Since the referent of 'I' is determined by the agent using it and there are three divine agents (*hypostases*), it follows that each divine *hypostasis* is aware of themselves through numerically the same use of the divine mental sentence 'I am God.' The *hypostases* share *numerically* the same use of such a divine mental sentence, but the conjunction of the Father plus the shared use of the mental sentence entails that the Father is aware that they themselves are God; and the conjunction of the Son plus the shared use of the mental sentence entails that the Son is aware that they themselves are God; and the conjunction of the Holy Spirit plus the shared use of the mental sentence entails that Holy Spirit is aware that they themselves are God. (See Williams (2022), response to objection five, for a detailed ontology of first-person perspective in the case of the divine *hypostases*. For further discussion, see Williams (2013) 78-88, Williams (2017) 327-336, Williams (2020) 101-107.)

I had called this a "Latin Social model."⁶⁹ It was called 'Latin' because the divine essence is claimed to be a singular thing (a trope) that is in each divine *hypostasis*, and it was called 'Social' because each divine *hypostasis* is claimed to be self-aware, such that each divine *hypostasis* is a referent of a shared use of a divine mental token of 'I.' But given my respect for Conciliar Trinitarianism, it is better to label this model a 'Conciliar Social model.' For, Constantinople III's statements affirming the numerical unity of the divine essence, nature, will, and actions, in the three divine *hypostases*, predominately came from Greek theologians and a Greco-Sicilian Pope, and only a minority from Latin theologians.

This discovery of Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology will, undoubtedly, help scholars in different disciplines to think more deeply about Trinitarian theology in the East and the West. For philosophical or analytic theologians, it should provoke deeper reflections on models of the Trinity. For historians, it should provoke deeper investigations into Trinitarian theologies from the 7th century. And for those scholars already deeply familiar with Patristic Trinitarian theology, they may find Constantinople III's Trinitarian theology like a relief valve from stress because it confirms all their protestations for many years against post-Hegelian (or I should say, post-miaphysite) Social models of the Trinity. I can imagine such scholars saying now, "At last, it's not just a matter of debating the interpretation of this or that respected ancient theologian. Now we have an *ecumenical council* that clearly rules out many Social models of the Trinity – at least the sort that assume a modern concept of personhood (or a miaphysite concept of *hypostasis* or *prosopon*) according to which there are 'personal wills and personal actions'."⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ See Williams (2017, 321-346); Williams (2020b, 96-117).

⁷⁰ I dedicate this article to the memory of David Riggs (D.Phil. Oxon.), a beloved mentor, Patristics scholar and Dean of the John Wesley Honors College at Indiana Wesleyan University, who passed away in August 2022.

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