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*Steven J. Duby*

## Response to Paul R. Hinlicky

STEVEN J. DUBY

I am grateful to Paul Hinlicky for taking the time to read and review the book *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*. However, in a review article, one typically expects to see a summary of the book's main arguments laid out in an orderly fashion—and in a manner that would enable the author of the book to affirm that the reviewer has in fact understood the book well and represented what the author has said fairly. Unfortunately, Hinlicky has not done this, leaving his review to be a stream of observations and claims that do not give me the impression that he has sought to represent the book's argument fairly. Hinlicky's observations move quite quickly from one issue to another. After trying to determine how I might organize my response to them, I think it may be best simply to identify points at which I take issue with Hinlicky's statements and to do this roughly according to the order in which he has made these statements. Here are some of them.

1. I do not advocate “restorationism” with respect to Reformed scholastic theology, though I certainly do draw liberally from the Reformed orthodox. There are many ways in which theology since the seventeenth century has presented fresh challenges that need to be addressed with fresh insights.
2. He speaks of me using a “pre-critical method of garnering and systematizing propositions” from the Bible and labels this what George Lindbeck calls “propositionalism.” Does Hinlicky believe it is better to employ what Lindbeck calls an “experiential-expressivist” view of doctrine or a “cultural-linguistic” view of doctrine? The former reduces doctrine to an articulation of one's own experience; the latter reduces it to a set of rules that govern a community's speech about God—without actually making claims about God as an object of knowledge. Divine revelation is certainly not reducible to a set of propositions, but when we are doing dogmatic theology we look at what Scripture teaches and attempt to set it forth in an orderly manner using propositions that help us understand what God has revealed.
3. Hinlicky says that I think of the Father, Son and Spirit as “modalities” of a “deity-person,” but I explicitly speak of “persons” (plural) throughout and reject the notion of there being just a single divine person.
4. Hinlicky charges me with conflating *ousia* and *hypostasis* when in fact I use and distinguish these terms throughout chapter five in order to talk

about what applies commonly to the three divine persons and what applies properly to each one.

5. *Pace* Hinlicky, I do not advocate a “psychological model” of the Trinity, with the processions of the persons explained in terms of thinking and willing.
6. *Pace* Hinlicky, the “social model” of the Trinity is not given to us in John 17. Given what the language of “social trinitarianism” now connotes, it is simply anachronistic (and question-begging) to insinuate that this “model” has been directly revealed to us in Scripture.
7. *Pace* Hinlicky, Robert Jenson’s “patrological” view of God’s unity is simply not substantiated as a retrieval of the trinitarianism of the Eastern fathers. I noted this in my review of Hinlicky’s book.
8. Authors like Jenson and Moltmann do not actually follow the classical Lutheran tradition in reading characteristics of Christ’s human life back into the eternal life of God. One can say that seventeenth-century Lutheranism employed a logic that enabled nineteenth-century Lutherans and later authors to espouse what is known as a *genus tapeinoticum* in Christology (a kind of communication in Christology wherein the “humble” properties of Christ’s humanity are communicated to his divine nature). But that is very different from saying that someone like Jenson is a true heir of Lutheran orthodox authors like Gerhard or Quenstedt.
9. Hinlicky questions whether divine simplicity as I have articulated it can cohere with God’s freedom, but he never substantively engages with my treatment of divine freedom in chapter five. It would be fine for him to disagree with my conclusions, but he simply doesn’t engage what I’ve said.
10. Hinlicky claims I have forced the God of the Bible into a “procrustean” metaphysical bed, but he says this without substantive interaction with what I’ve said about the relationship between theology and metaphysics in chapter two. This is a tired line from authors who have problems with the use of classical philosophical concepts in theology proper. It gives the impression that those who disagree with a more traditional Christian view of God are the only ones who can truly expound Scripture without using or being influenced by extrabiblical and philosophical terminology. None of us does exegesis or dogmatics in a vacuum, and all of us must argue for the fecundity of whatever extrabiblical concepts we might wish to employ in our description of God.
11. Hinlicky appears to take Kant’s transcendental idealism to be axiomatic for theological epistemology. However, Kant’s epistemology arguably disavows

all claims to know God as an object outside our own minds—and the approaches of authors like Barth, Jenson and Hinlicky all conflict with Kant here.<sup>1</sup>

12. Pace Hinlicky's assertion, I do not deny the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*. He could have accurately said that I do not accept the Lutheran interpretation of it. The fact that he simply asserts that I deny the doctrine is extremely careless.
13. Hinlicky suggests that acknowledging the presence of mystery in the doctrine of God is a matter of conceding "defeat." Is there no place for mystery at all? Should we not acknowledge that there is and then debate where it must be acknowledged and where our analysis must cease?
14. The "liberty of indifference" is not that of a "tyrant." It just means that God was free either to create or not to create the world without detriment to his own completeness. The idea that God has to create the world (and the evil in it) in order to actualize himself is what actually would render him an untrustworthy narcissist.
15. Hinlicky suggests that Aristotelian metaphysical concepts are no longer intelligible. Does the average person really have no capacity for distinguishing between, for example, the nature of a thing and various qualities that may be added to it? Does the philosophy of Kant or Hegel actually resonate with human persons' pre-critical experience of the world?
16. Hinlicky invokes Jenson saying that the "metaphysics of persistence" (as far as I can tell, the view that God is God by remaining the God that he eternally was) yields an idolatrous conception of God. In fact, though, it is arguably Jenson's God, who depends upon others for the establishment of his identity and must achieve his identity over time, that is implicitly like the false gods described in Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example.

Finally, I would like to conclude the interaction with Hinlicky by simply making the point that a strong understanding of God's aseity is in fact what enables the gospel of Jesus Christ to be the gospel of grace. If God is complete in himself even without reference to the world, then the incarnation is truly a generous act of God. If, however, God would not be God without the incarnation—or if the incarnation were a necessary outworking of his being—then the incarnation would be a matter of divine self-fulfillment, which means that it would no longer be a matter of free generosity. I would argue that it is a more traditional understanding of God's aseity and simplicity that makes sense of what takes place in the work of Christ announced

1. See Martin Westerholm, "Kant's Critique and Contemporary Theology," *Modern Theology* 31 (2015), 403-27.

in the gospel for our salvation. I think Hinlicky would be in agreement with at least some of this, but his recurring appeals to Jenson lead me to believe his theology does not allow for the sort of account of divine aseity and freedom needed to confirm that grace is grace.