Notes on Ch. 4: The Triune God

A. The basic task of this chapter is to explore the controlling grammar of the church's use of the word 'God' and its rough equivalents in other languages.
Concern for:
    i) the *syntax* **of 'God'**—the relation of the word/sign 'God' to other words/signs;
    ii) the *semantics* **of 'God'**—the rules of reference, of identifying God; and
    iii) the *pragmatics* **and** form of life in which the sign has its proper location and meaning.
In chapter 2 we explored the basic belief that God is self-revealing in three normative patterns of *identifying references*:
    1. God is the One who elected, liberated, and covenanted with Israel and is thereby the One who is the sovereign Creator of all things.
    2. God is the One who is singularly incarnate in and thereby definitively self-revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
    3. God is the One who empowers the church into being and moves within creaturely life to draw all creatures into a redemptive future.
At the vibrant center of these references is the ***divinity of Jesus***, and it is this divinity of Jesus that also transforms how we understand God in Israel and in the movements of the Spirit.
    Omit the divinity of Jesus, and the semantic rules for identifying God would be dependent on some other more basic semantic rules.
Hence, I will be contending with churchly inclinations to rely on other—presumably more basic—semantic rules, and I will be negating the following proposals for deriving the basic semantic rules of Christian God-talk:
    1. Negates the claim that the basic rules will be provided by a logically independent metaphysics, ontology, or natural theology—such as classical theism, process theism, or metaphysical idealism.
    2. Negates the claim that the basic rules will be provided by theory of natural or universal religious experience.
    3. Negates the claim that God is essentially ineffable and indescribable.

B. Bear this truism in mind throughout all of our discussions: all language about God is human language, bound to human traditions, practices, conventions, and intentions.
Calvin has claimed that God has *accommodated* Godself to human language and understanding through the witness of Holy Scripture.
Yet the following rule has been repeatedly affirmed in the life of the church in many traditions: **God cannot be defined**: to define something is to put that subject in a class of things; God is not in a class—*deus est non in genere*.
Hence, God cannot be spoken of in *univocal concepts*—that is, concepts that apply primarily to finite objects cannot be applied to God with the same meaning.
It would seem, then, that our language about God must be in the form of analogies, metaphors, 'figures of speech', etc.
    Analogia Entis—analogy of being—is systematically dependent on the ontology of classical theism. See my critique of this tradition [153-55].
    Metaphor is itself a rather unstable concept, but nevertheless useful.
    Analogia Fidei—analogy of faith—a distinctively Protestant way of emphasizing that the language of the Bible, with its narratives, figures of speech, etc. is the first place to look for that language, as analogous, for understanding who God is and what God does.
To the extent that I have been emphasizing God's self-revelation in the history of Israel, in Jesus, and in the Spirit, a primacy is being given to *analogia fidei*.

C. **Patriarchy and 'Father' Language** [158-166]

This is an exceedingly complex and disputed area of Christian discourse, and I have tried to walk
through it very carefully, but cannot repeat here all that is there.

Please read this section carefully.

In brief, I argue that:

1. Patriarchy is that system of social organization in which the male is understood as inherently
superior to the female and is the natural head of the family, clan, and larger social order.
2. Such patriarchal language is scattered throughout the Bible and traditions and has had a deleterious
affect on understanding what it means to be female, as well as what it means to be male.
3. For reasons theological, the church must find ways of talking about God and humanity that are not
dependent on patriarchal images and logic.
4. It is appropriate to use analogies and metaphors that are primarily female to refer to God and God's
activity in the world.
5. I then make 'Some interim suggestions' for the church's language as it sorts through these difficult
issues in God-talk. [162-64]
6. I do argue and insist that there is a non-patriarchal use of the Trinitarian language of 'Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit' that must be preserved and not translated out of the language of the church.

Note: after reading this section carefully and reflecting extensively on my analyses and proposals, I
am open to and willing to discuss your urgent questions and objections.

D. Some Notes from Church History

1. Note the significance of these NT liturgical practices: baptizing persons "in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" [Mt 28.19]; worshipping Jesus as Lord and Savior and
praying to Jesus.
2. The rejection of Marcion in the post-apostolic church in the second century: Marcion claimed that
the god of the OT was a lesser divinity full of anger and jealousy while the God of Jesus was a
God of Love. Church decided that the Creator and Jesus were not two distinct deities but one in
some sense.
3. **Nicene Creed of 325**:

Arius was an intellectual Platonist who averred that God is immutable, impassible, and simple,
while Jesus was a human being who suffered and died on a cross and therefore could not have
been divine in any sense; Jesus was, however, the highest and noblest of creatures and the
first born of all creatures, but only a creature.

After debates complex and subtle, the council at Nicaea rejected Arius' reasoning and decided
that Jesus and the Father were *homoousion*—of one essential reality.

Issue left dangling: if the Father is immutable, impassible, and simple, then how can Jesus who is
mutable, creaturely, acted upon and crucified, be of the same reality as the Father?

**In my judgment the council was correct in affirming the oneness of the Father and the Son,
but refused to correct or modify the basic platonic rule that God as Supreme is of
necessity immutable—unchanging; impassible—unmoved, never moved by another or
acted upon by another reality, apathetic; and simple—completely devoid of complexity
or parts, indivisible.**

4. **Post-Nicene Consensus: that God is both One and Three**

Greek-Eastern: God is *one being [ousia] in three hypostaseis* or *prosopon*

Latin-West: *one substance [substantia] of God in three persons [personae]*

Hence, Trinitarian orthodoxy was bound to say that God is both one reality and three realities.

Three prominent construals were labeled heretical:

Modalism: seemed to claim that the One God is the real God and is utterly transcendent of the
world but becomes manifest in the world in successive lesser appearances as Father, Son,
and Spirit; hence the real transcendent God is not incarnate in a human being.

Subordinationism: tended to deny that Son and Spirit are equally God with the Father.

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Tritheism: there are really three gods who have the same essence but are different subject-agents—the real threat in the early church was that of polytheism and the church's trinitarian language often appeared to the world as polytheistic language of many gods.
5. Up until the Protestant Reformation, Trinitarian doctrine was repeatedly affirmed but retained all the unresolved anomalies of the Nicene consensus.
> Luther and Calvin were Trinitarian but spent little effort trying to analyze Trinitarian language and formulations—except Luther's bold statement that the death of Christ went to the heart of God.
> Hegel in the early 19th century developed a sophisticated understanding of trinity, advocating real otherness and complexity internal to the life of God, but tended to emphasize that God needed a world in order to be God.
> The twentieth century has seen a remarkable re-emergence of Trinitarian reflection at the heart of all theologizing; Barth breathed new life by way of his strong Christology, the Roman tradition renewed concern for Trinitarian language, and the last half of the century has seen one of the most intense and creative explorations of Trinitarian doctrine.

E. Current questions from Barth and Rahner:
> Is God to be understood as one Person in three manifestations, or as three persons in mutual interrelationships?
> Both believe that popular Christianity thinks there are three subjects or individual persons in the trinity, but that such is basically heretical.
> But current '*social trinitarians*' emphasize that there are three persons in the trinity that are complexly interrelated to each other.
> These issues bring about a new retrieval of the older language of the difference between the '**Immanent Trinity**'—the internal relations among the persons independent of the creation—and the '**Economic Trinity**'—the historical self-revealing of God in the creation as the God of Israel, as the God incarnate in Jesus, and as the God moving folk in the Spirit.
> By emphasizing the priority of the economic trinity, current discussion—mine too—emphasizes that **we come to understand who God is by looking at how God has manifested/revealed Godself in the world**.
> Or, we understand who God is by understanding God's acts of self-revelation in the world.
> **God is who God is as the One who does what God does; it is in God's acts that we come to understand the being or reality of God**.
> Hence, we are using analogical language that has limitations, but I propose that any serious discussion of Trinitarian grammar must not subvert the following rules:
>> 1. that it is *one and same God* who is self-revealing in the identifying references of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;
>> 2. that the grammar should accommodate the *differences* or *otherness* evident in the NT narrative among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[**Pause: note the following topics in the remainder of this chapter:**
> The Grammar of God's Self-Identifications: The Economic Trinity
> The Grammar of God's Unity, Multiplicity, Relationality, and Complexity
> The Grammar of God as the Triune One Who Loves in Freedom
> The Grammar of God's Essence and God's Actuality
> The Grammar of the Immanent Trinity
> The Grammar of God's Essential Attributes
> The Grammar of God's Self-Determined Relational Attributes
> The Grammar of God's Transcendence and Immanence

These are not quite the prime topics of the traditional grammar of the church in its various orthodoxies.

Precisely because I am aiming to subvert some of those orthodoxies, while preserving some others, I must be understood as teaching another way of construing the reality of God as Triune that intends to stay close to biblical testimony while vigorously critiquing and engaging some of the hegemonic concepts/grammars of these other orthodoxies.

Hence, precisely because these following topics are destructively and reconstructively critical in character and require careful attention to the logic and grammar of the concepts, I wince at having to make comments that are mere summaries of a discussion that is already tight and all too brief. Please attend to the text at hand in the book, which is already briefer than might be desirable.

An essay published in 1998 entitled "God: Triune in Essence and Actuality" is a succinct version of much of the remaining discussion and can be found on my web site under Essays/Notes at
http://grammaroffaith.com/index.php/grammar/post/godtriune_in_essence_and_actuality

For those of you readers/friends who come from the Free Church traditions that have generally avoided or scoffed-at Trinitarian issues, I ask you to go slow and keep before your own mind just what it means for you to call Jesus 'Lord and Savior' and how does that bear on how you talk about/conceive the reality of God.]

F. The Grammar of God's Self-Identifications: the Economic Trinity [180-89]
   First Foundational Identifying Reference:
   God is the One who elected, liberated, and covenanted with Israel and thereby is the One who is the sovereign Creator of all things.
   We would be refusing to engage the identifying references of the biblical testimony if we followed Marcion and presumed that God in Christ is a different god than the God of Israel; the NT never doubts that God in Christ is the God of Israel, even though it is itself engaged in the arduous task of sorting out the ways in which God in Christ also modifies how we understand the God of Israel.
   God is identified as the One who self-identifies to Moses and Israel as 'Yahweh'—'I am who I am' or 'I will be who I will be' [Ex 3.13-15]
   God freely covenants with Israel and liberates Israel from captivity to other gods and rulers.
   God is the Sovereign Creator of the world, which has many other creatures than Israel, and this tethers Israel's understanding to the *Sovereign Singularity of God*.
   It is this God of Israel that comes to be known as the Father of Jesus the Son.
   Second Foundational Identifying Reference:
   God is the One who is singularly incarnate in and thereby definitively self-revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
   Omit the belief that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—a Jew among the Jews of Israel—is the self-revealing life of the God of Israel, and you have disjoined the Gospel from Jesus, and his life and teaching might be illuminating of the real god, but surely not the self-revelation, the self-identifying life of God.
   Must come to grips with the conceptual/grammatical fact that *Trinitarian belief arises only if Jesus is the divine life in time*; Trinitarian belief is not about the mysteries of three-in-one, or the unity of the world, etc.
   But: if Jesus is the divine life incarnate at a particular point in historical time, then the church's previous orthodoxies must more adequately come to grips with an *otherness*, a *differentiation,* and a *becomingness* in God's life that some of its previous grammatical rules seemed to disallow.
   Third Foundational Identifying Reference:
   God is the One who empowers the church into being and moves within creaturely life to draw all creatures into a redemptive future.
   The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son.

Must note that there is much Spirit-talk in the NT but it is never said that the Spirit *is* the Father or *is* the Son as such. The differentiation of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is there in the Scriptural witness.

It is also interesting to note that, while the difference of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is recognized early in the post-apostolic church, it takes awhile for the divinity of the Spirit to become explicitly recognized and confessed.

It is these identifying references, as *narrative references biblically grounded*, that I call the '*triune matrix*' that is a constant given for the church, thus requiring the church to clarify how God can be understood as both One God and yet a God who has or possesses differences, otherness within the divine life.

G. The Grammar of God's Unity, Multiplicity, Relationality, and Complexity [189-98]

1. The Unity of God is the Unity of a Person-Subject

Trading here on the *analogy* to a person as an intentional agent, who knows, intends, wills, decides, and feels and is thereby a center of consciousness and agency.

Am *denying that God's unity* is:

a. analogous to the unity of a *common essence* that the three person-subjects have in common. Would seem to suggest that the real divinity is the essence itself, which the three person-subjects have in common, thus falling into the trap of tritheism—three subjects who are divine.

b. analogous to the unity of a *community of persons in particular relationships*. But what is it about their relationships that constitutes the community as divine? This emphasis inevitably seems to emphasize that it is the character of the relationships that constitutes the divinity, which seems to locate the divinity in that common character.

It seems to me that we must not relinquish a basic sense that God is One, analogically, an 'I' who meets us a 'Thou'.

2. God is One Person in Three Modes of Being-in-Act [191—92]

'Mode' is a technical concept being defined as a way of being and acting of an agent subject.

Essential point: God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has three decisive ways of being God, and 'mode' is being used here as a way of avoiding the impression in our time of God being three individual persons.

Each mode of God is equally a mode of God.

3. God is a Complex Person-Subject [193-94]

God has three co-equal ways of being God; three ways of being an 'I' and three ways of being a 'thou'.

In contrast to the heresy of 'modalism', which maintained that the manifestations of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit in history were only diminished appearances of the One God who remains splendidly unmoved and simple above the fray of creation and history, I am affirming that God is really God in these three ways of being God—i.e., the modes are internal to the being of God.

In contrast to the traditions' emphasis on the simplicity of God, which protected God from being affected by the transactions of creatures in time, I am affirming that God is a *complex* Person, a self-differentiating Person-Subject.

4. The Modes of God are Distinct, Interrelated, and Interanimated [194-97]

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *distinct*: the Father is not the Son nor the Spirit; the Son is not the Father nor the Spirit; and the Spirit is not the Father nor the Son.

Hence, there is *otherness* within God's life.

But the Father is *interrelated* and *interanimated* by and with the Son and the Spirit, as is the Son and Spirit interrelated and interanimated by the Father and by each other.

We are thus empowered to wonder at the dynamic interaction of the triune being of God in God's *perichoresis*—that uniquely and lively dancing interaction of God within Godself and in relation to the world.

5. Important Negations and Qualifiers [197-98]

Denying i) that God is fundamentally impassible, unmoving and simple, and ii) that the modes of God's life and being are mere passing appearances that do not reach into the very being of God.

Also denying that the language of 'modes-of-being' is primarily imported from an existing ontology to which God *must be conformed*. Rather, such language is used as a way of preserving intelligibly both the unity or oneness of God and the differences within God.

Yet we can also see some of the strengths of the '*social analogy'* of God's life as capturing that biblical sense of the distinctions among the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Yet the social analogy left to itself fails to adequately grasp the oneness of God.

Hence, we must remember that this language remains *analogical*, and, beyond the grammatical qualifiers we have adduced, God remains an incomprehensible mystery; but God is not ineffable and an utterly transcendent and unknown X.

H. The Grammar of God as the Triune One Who Loves in Freedom [198-204]

At the heart of the definitive self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the conviction that God loves and that God loves freely.

Claiming that freedom and love are the two fundamental attributes of God that will shape our understanding of all the other attributes or characters or traits of God.

1. The Basic Grammar of God's Grace

By unfolding the NT grammar of God's grace, we can become oriented to how love and freedom are bound together in the life of God.

God's grace is always God's *free gift*—God's free and voluntary giving, without compulsion or necessity or as warranted reward for demonstrated merit.

God's grace conveys *beneficial effects undeserved and freely given*.

This NT sense of God's grace brings to concentrated focus all the biblical narrative characterizations of *God as freely giving, merciful, loving, and forgiving*.

To grasp the grammar of God's grace is to understand that God's love and freedom cannot be separated nor one prioritized over the other.

2. The Grammar of God's Freedom

a. God's freedom is God's unencumbered power to will and enact God's own life and actions.

b. God's freedom is also God's free self-determination—not constrained by any higher power or in the grip of a metaphysical principle that limits God's actions.

c. God's freedom includes God's free self-determination to-be-conditioned-by-another.

d. Yet God is never affected by another actuality *except* as God freely decides or self-determines to be so affected.

Note: it this capacitated freedom of God to self-determine Godself to be affected by another that is steadfastly denied and muted by various forms of the classical theist's claim that God is basically immutable and impassible—utterly unaffected by any other actuality.

e. God's freedom is God's self-movement and becomingness—God is not sealed up in Godself as unchanging monad.

God can self-determine Godself to create a world of nondivine creatures and to have an interactive life with the world.

f. Yet God's freedom does not include any freedom not-to-love, yet *what* and *how* God loves is also God's own free self-determination.

g. God's freedom is thus God's transcendent sovereignty over the world.

3. The Grammar of God's Love

a. God's love is God's giving of Godself to another, to the beloved object—the root of God's self-revelation, self-communication to another.

b. God's love is God's capacity to will the good of another and God's actually willing that good.

c. God's love is God's openness to the being of another, to letting the other be, and to being affected by the other—God's non-jealous, empathetic compassion for another.

d. In love God desires a reciprocal relationship with the other, yet God does not love in order to be loved. Yet the desire for mutuality with another does not *befall* God nor compel God.

e. Yet, being loved by another makes a difference to God and affects God.

f. There are two types of 'others' that God loves: i) the other that is internal to God's life—the love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; ii) the other who is a nondivine creature. Yet because God is triune, love is internal to God; God does not need the world of creatures in order to be loving; rather God creates a world of nondivine creatures as an act of free self-determination to bring a nondivine world into being.

4. The Grammar of God's Aseity

God's aseity is God's power to be the triune One who loves in freedom.

In the classical traditions, God's aseity was conceived as God's immutability and impassibility utterly unaffected by any other being.

By keeping God's freedom and God's love tethered together we can reconceive God's aseity as God's power to live in loving self-determination, including the free self-determination to create a world and to have an interactive life with the world.

To further clarify the grammar of God's aseity we will need to develop a distinction between God's essence and God's actuality.

I. The Grammar of God's Essence and God's Actuality [204-12]

1. What Do We mean by 'Essence'?

In much traditional and ordinary discourse, the *essence* or *nature* of something is an answer to the question of '*what sort* of thing is this?'

Hence, in answer to the question of what sort of thing Fred and Priscilla are, we could answer 'they are human beings'. 'Being a human' can be predicated of Fred and Priscilla, but Fred and Priscilla cannot be predicated of anything else—they are 'subjects' of which we can predicate 'human being'.

And Fred and Priscilla, as human beings, are subject to much change through time; but their essence, human being, is itself unchanging.

Essences do not change, persons/subjects do change.

Plato and many other philosophers and many post-apostolic Xn theologians considered the following to be axiomatic: it is better to be unchanging than to be changing, for that which changes can either change for the better or for the worst.

Hence, since God is perfect and cannot change for the better and cannot change for the worse, God must be perfect and unchanging.

The following becomes a hard and fast grammatical rule for much Xn grammar:

a. God's essence is unchanging

b. God's essence and existence are identical

c. So, God's existence/actuality is unchanging

d. Hence, God is unchanging, simple, and impassible in essence and existence/actuality.

2. The Priority of God's Actuality

In order to recover a genuine triune understanding of God as the eternally actual triune Subject who lives in three modes of being-in-act, we need to rethink the priority of God's actuality.

Hence, God's actuality is the basic and inclusive reality of God, of which we can also construe some essential predicates/characters/traits; these traits are the *essence* of God and as such are unchanging, but they only have reality as the essence of God's *actuality*, which can change and become and live.

This is difficult: God's essence is immutable and unchanging, but God's actuality is capable of becoming and moving. Or, another way, God's essence is not an acting subject-person, but God actuality is an acting person-subject, of which there are essential, unchanging predicates/attributes, though there are also some predicates/attributes that presuppose the world as having been created by God.

3. God's Actuality as Dynamic Becoming and Agency

In actuality God *can* change, become, be responsive to, be affected by, suffer with, and be in real relation with that which is other than God.

These seem to be those traits and powers required by the biblical testimony to God's living self-communications and self-identifying interactions with the world as the One who loves in freedom.

But just here we must not make the conceptual/grammatical mistake of most process theologians who contend it is God's essential nature to have a world and to interact with that world—God *must have a world other than God in order to be God*.

On the contrary, I am positing that God's being-in-relation to that which is not God is always to be understood as God's free and loving self-determined decision-to-be-in-relation, to affect and to-be-affected-by-others.

To put it sharply, the God we know in the economy of God's life with the world is the *God who is freely and self-determinately lovingly actual as*:

a. the Creator of this world, this cosmos;

b. affected by and in real relation with this world;

c. incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and affected in God's actuality by this incarnation—the lineaments of the doctrine of atonement;

d. the Spirit who freely and lovingly moves the world toward a future yet-to-be-actual redemption;

e. the Tri-Moded Subject who self-determinately in love wills to have a history with the creation.

4. The Essence and Actuality of God's Freedom and Love

In order to preserve and render intelligible God's freedom to create a world and to have a life with that world, we need to grasp that:

a. God's creation of world is not a necessity of God's essence or nature; God could have been God without creating a world.

b. Yet, God did create a world—bring into being a host of nondivine creatures—but such was God's free and loving decision to so create a world.

c. Yet, in creating such a world, God also freely self-determines Godself to love, to be affected by the ongoing life of the world in time.

d. Contra traditional orthodoxies and classical theism, God freely chooses in love to be affected by the world, to have an interactive life with the world.

e. Contra process theisms, the world is not necessary to God in order for God to be God; God's nature or essence does not require that there must be that which is not-God and which necessarily affects God.

See further points on pp. 210-211 concerning the differences from classical theism and from process theism.

J. The Grammar of the Immanent Trinity

The language of Immanent Trinity and of Economic Trinity is rooted in the history of the church as it aims at clarifying its Trinitarian language.

In brief, this language contained the following distinctions: i) the Economic Trinity refers to God's management of the world in which God is manifest as the Creator/Father, as the incarnate and reconciling Son, and as the loving, inspiring Spirit; ii) while the Immanent

Trinity refers to those internal relationships and roles among the Father, the Son, and the
Spirit essential to the Economic Trinity but not dependent on the Economic Trinity.

Good point: helped to affirm that God is not just triune in relation to the world, but is triune in
Godself, God *in se* and that God did not have to create the world in order to be God.

Deficiency: since it also posited that God did not need to create the world, the Immanent Trinity
devolved into emphasizing even more sharply that God's internal life is the real innermost
being of God and unaffected by the world.

I prefer to refer to God's triune life before God's creating of the world as the *Primordial Triune
Actuality of God* and God's life with the world as the *Economic Triune Actuality of God*.

K. The Grammar of God's Essential Attributes

The further usefulness of the distinction between God's Primordial or Immanent Triune Life and
God's Economic Life with the world, is that we can distinguish between those attributes that are
essential to God, whether prior to or with the world and those attributes of God that are self-
determined relational to the world.

Will define an *essential attribute of God* as a characterizing trait of God that is necessary to God and
without which God could not actually be God—i.e., an essential attribute is that sort of
characterizing trait without which God would be inconceivable and which is manifest in all of
God's actuality, whether before creating a world or in having created a world.

Such essential attributes are:
a. God is Triune
b. God is Free
c. God is Love
d. God is Almighty
e. God is Living
f. God is Eternal
g. God is Wise
h. God is Necessarily Actual

Will omit from our further discussion below the attributes of love and freedom that have already been
interpreted as essential to God and add only this brief note about the attribute of Tri-unity—
affirms that God is essentially a Person-Subject with three ways of being God both internally and
in relation to the world. Putting tri-unity as an essential attribute will thus block any attempt to
say God *becomes* triune in creating and redeeming the world.

God is Almighty

Concerns how we refer to *God's power*, but I find the traditional concept of *omnipotence* full of
ambiguities and shortcomings:
a. suggests that God has all the power there is, which veers toward pantheism or monism.
b. suggests that God is absolute and unrestricted power—*potentia absoluta*—which would
make God's power utterly arbitrary and unrestricted; Barth argues that such a conception
of God's power is demonic. We do not worship power as such and unrestricted.

1. God's power is always the power of God's love; there is no unrestricted power of God that is
prior to God's love.
2. God has the power to be actual as the triune Person-Subject who loves in freedom.
3. God's power is thus manifested in all God's other attributes as *the power of God to be God*.
4. as Almighty, God is the *sovereign power* in relation to the world: power to create nondivine
actualities, power to order the nondivine world, power to reconcile and redeem the world—
there is no other power or actuality that is superior to God's power.
5. All other powers in the world have their power only under divine creation and permission.
6. As Almighty, God has power sufficient to accomplish all God's purposes in creating,
governing, reconciling, and redeeming the world.

7. God has the power to self-determinately limit God's power, to become vulnerable to nondivine powers and actualities, to become incarnate in a human life and to suffer a human death, to raise dead humans to redemptive life, to persuade and empower humans to respond in faith.

8. God has the power to decide among possibilities and to enact possibilities—must refuse to say that God lacks the power to enact what God decides to enact.

9. While we can say with process theologians that God has persuasive power, we do not restrict God's power to persuasion.

10. We can avoid saying that God is Pure Actuality, as though God is without potentiality unactualized.

God is Living

Picks up the biblical affirmation that God lives and is the source of life—the primary feature of life is its power to be active, to move, to have energy.

This attribute undermines the truthfulness of such misleading attributes as being immobile, unmoving, immutable, impassible, frozen in eternal stasis.

As living, God has the power to become, to self-move, to be affected by other actualities, to suffer human death without being defeated by death.

God is Eternal

1. As eternal, God is everlasting, imperishable, and without beginning or end.

   The time of creatureliness is that incessant sequentiality of before, now, and after, of not being able to go back in time or to avoid temporal sequentiality.

2. Yet we must refuse to think of eternity as the simple negation of time, as sheer timelessness, which has been the emphasis in much tradition.

   If God were sheer timelessness then God would not be free to have time for the creature, to be affected by the creature's time or by its perishing and finitude.

3. Because of God's incarnation in creaturely life and time, God's eternality must grasp God's openness to time, to its sequentiality, to being affected by its time.

4. Because God is actual everlastingly, God's eternality has a sequentiality of before, with, and after that is uniquely God's; in God's sequentiality there is no absolute perishing in the movement from 'before' to 'with' to 'after'.

5. But God's eternality is not an infinite sequential extension of being-in-time.

6. I am also leery of Barth's and Boethius's emphasis on God's *pure duration and simultaneity*—simultaneously present to past, present, and future; suggests too strongly that somehow, before God, everything finite simply is, as though the future is already there before God.

7. That God is eternal does not negate that Jesus the Son died a real human death on the cross. For creatures, death is that perishing in ceasing to be a living creature. Jesus' death is the enduring of that creaturely perishing, but such is not that absolute perishing of ceasing to be divine.

God is Wise

Will opt out of the traditional formulation here regarding God's omniscience—that God knows everything, even the future.

Will instead refer to God's knowing as eternally God's loving knowledge—God's *Sophia*.

1. God's wisdom is God's own internal knowings, relatings, and communications as Father, Son, and Spirit—God knowing God eternally.

2. God is wise as the fount of all truth, of cosmic order and purpose, of loving knowledge; this is truth as *that which is the case* and as *that which is authentic*.

3. As wise, God provides order and purpose in the bringing to be of the creaturely world; it is out of God's wisdom that God creates a world of creatures and engages an interactive history with the creation.

4. The wisdom of God is manifest in the cross of Jesus Christ, and stands in contrast to the truth-claiming—the authenticating purposes and ordering—of the human social worlds; herein Jesus is the incarnate wisdom of God.

5. As wise, God knows all there is to know; nothing escapes God's knowing.
   God's knowing, as wise knowing, is the standard for all truth and knowledge.
   If there is any primary meaning the locution 'objective knowledge' it is God's knowledge, yet peculiarly among humans to be 'objective' is to be neutral, uninvolved, while God's knowing is passionate love.
   Hence, God's truth never intends neutrality and apathy but life and authenticity.
6. Am leery of saying that God's wise knowing even knows the future *before* it has happened, for such conveys the impression that the future has *already happened before God.*
   The grammar here is difficult and opaque, but we can say that *God's wisdom is so penetrating that God does know—and suffers often in the knowing—the potentiated trajectories of human lives and societies.*

God is Necessarily Actual
The discussion here arises also in attempts to argue for the necessary existence of God, often referred to as the Ontological Argument; while that does not appear to me as a good argument apart from Christian convictions, there are some arresting points to be made.
Basically and grammatically, God cannot cease to be God.
But *necessarily actual* does not mean that every moment of God's life is as such necessary for God, for such would deny that God freely decides *how to be actual* in relation to the unfolding of creaturely history.
Good points here, so check it out further.

L. The Grammar of God's Self-Determined Relational Attributes
While God's essential attributes characterize all of God's actual life, some attributes of God *presuppose nondivine actualities or creatures* and therefore characterize God's self-determined relationality with those actualities.
These are the attributes—in addition to the essential attributes—which in particular characterize *God's actuality as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer* of the world of creatures.

God is Perfect
God's perfection exists precisely in God's self-determined Life in and with the world, and in those relationships God lacks nothing.
But this sort of perfection is a rejection of the traditions' emphasis that God's perfection is God's supreme self-sufficiency as the simple, immutable, and impassible One who is untouched by the trials and tribulations of creatures.
When we are counseled to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect [Mt 5.48], we are not being counseled to be supremely self-sufficient and unaffected by the lives of others.
   Rather, we are being counseled to lovingly give of ourselves to others in the way God has lovingly given of Godself to the world.

God is Omnipresent
We need a grammar of the various ways in which God is present in the world of creatures, rather than simply saying God is present everywhere.
   Must resist this sense of God's undifferentiated presence everywhere and grasp the various ways in which God is present to creatures in the world.
   1. Everything we affirm about God's presence in the world must be affected by the *definitive presence of God in Jesus of Nazareth.*
      The radical presence of identity: God the eternal Son is Jesus, is incarnate presence, and therefore we have no need of the misleading grammar that asserts that God is incarnate everywhere in the world.
      God is not incarnate everywhere, but such incarnation in Jesus does open the way to understanding various ways in which God is present, even if such presences are not incarnate presences.

2. God is always free in God's multiple presences to creatures in the world; therefore we should not construe such presences as a *property* of the creature.

3. All creaturely times and spaces, and therefore all creaturely actualities, are open to the presence of God; the world is not sealed up and closed to God, as the modern and postmodern worlds seem to believe.

4. God has multiple ways of being present to the creature—will call these ways *modes of presence*:

   Present in the *mode of the creaturely ground of the creature's being and life*—in the mode of the Father/Creator.

   Present in the *mode of encounter with the creature*—the mode of the eternal Son or Word of God, meeting and confronting the creature as an *I* being received as a *thou*.

   Present in the *mode of empowerment within the creature's life*—the mode of the Spirit of God, in which the creature's spirit becomes *permeable* to the divine Spirit without *displacing* the creature's spirit.

5. There are also the different and multiple configurations of presence I will call these *modalities of presence*, which need not have one paradigm of presence and include such presences as God's communicative presence at Sinai, in the giving and receiving of Torah, in the practices of worship, in the celebration of the Lord's supper, in preaching, in prayer, etc.

   In other words, the many configurations of God being *under, to, with, and within* the creature's life.

6. God may be present in one mode or modality without being presence in another; hence, we can also speak of the felt *absence of God*.

God is Holy and Righteous

As Holy, God's life is infinitely differentiated from all creaturely life and yet as Holy, God is the ground and measure of all life, and an awesome presence not under the control of the creature.

As Holy, God is supremely Good and Righteous—the orderer of all right order and the judge of all creaturely order; God's righteousness is teleologically ordered to the creature's flourishing before God.

God is Patient, Merciful, and Gracious

As *patient*, God freely and lovingly gives the creature actuality and space and time in which to live and enjoy God's righteous order.

   As patient, God *consents* to the being of the creature and grants the creature relative power and independence.

   But God's patient is not unlimited—God does not ultimately leave the creature to its own devices and stratagems.

As *merciful,* God comes to the rescue of the creature; it is this mercy that limits God's patience.

As *gracious*, God freely and lovingly atones for the creature's sin, forgives the sin, seeks fellowship with the creature, and summons the creature to embrace freely new possibilities of living in love.

God's patience, mercy, and grace are God's free and loving self-determinations to be affected by the creature's life and distresses; can call these attributes the *empathy of God for the creature.*

The Grammar of God's Transcendence and Immanence

It is a regrettable truism that, during these days, the language of the church about God's transcendence of the world and God's immanence in the world is wild and chaotic.

I propose these basic grammatical rules for talking about God's transcendence and immanence:

a. God's immanence in the world is not simple *identity*—God is not the world.
b. God's transcendence of the world is not simple *separation from* the world.
c. It is always the transcendence of the God who is multiply immanent in the world.
d. It is always the immanence of God who is *freely* immanent in the world and never a *property* of the world.
e. It is always the free and loving self-determined transcendence and presence of the triune God we know in God's self-identifications in and with and to the world.

Concluding word: this chapter has been focused on generating coherent and truthful grammar about the triune God, in the hope that this deep grammar will also facilitate and stimulate further ways of using analogies, metaphors, parables, and stories to talk responsibly and faithfully about God.

Hence, this grammar of the triune God is not exhaustive of our linguistic witness to the reality of God; properly used and learned, it will hopefully guide and generate other ways a witnessing truthfully to God.