



The Cyrilian Solution: Cyril of Jerusalem and Saul Kripke on Naming God

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Abstract

Cyril of Jerusalem's proposed theology of the Trinity has been labeled generic. That is, the term "God" identifies not so much a species of being or an individual being, but a unique, *sui generis* genus. Within the genus of God there are three species or ways of being God, though not three discrete individual beings. The article will attempt to defend and renew Cyril's theology by an appeal to the contemporary philosopher, Saul Kripke, and his notion of rigid designators. One way to contemporize and perhaps better understand Cyril's position is to interpret the term "God" as a Kripkean natural kind rigid designator with the properties of Fatherhood, Sonship, and Spiration.

Keywords

Cyril of Jerusalem, Saul Kripke, Trinity, *docta ignorantia*, genus-species, rigid designator, natural kind

The unknowable and unspeakable mystery of the divine nature is, without question, a bedrock presupposition and *regula fidei* of patristic theology. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, one time bishop of Jerusalem from 349 until his death in 387, gets at the rationality of this first principle with the following rhetorical questions: "If the very least of His works are not comprehended, will He who made all things be comprehended? . . . If his judgments and ways are incomprehensible, will He Himself be comprehended?"¹ And again, "For, if it is quite impossible to imagine His likeness, how will thought ever come near His substance?"² Cyril does not stand out as unique among his

¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis (Cat.)* 6.9. The Fathers of the Church, vols. 61 and 64, *St. Cyril of Jerusalem*, translated by Leo McCauley and Anthony Stephenson (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1969, 1970).

² Cyril, *Cat.* 6.7.

contemporaries for his methodological modesty; ample testimony can be produced to demonstrate the centrality of the principle of unknowability, or *docta ignorantia*, in patristic writing.³

The church fathers insist that we vigilantly and constantly curtail the degree of confidence which we place on any human understanding of the substance, nature, will, intellect, and even name of the divine. According to Justin Martyr, “the appellation ‘God’ is not a name, but an opinion implanted in the nature of men of a thing that can hardly be explained.”⁴ Gregory of Nyssa confesses, “the only name which suits God is the belief that he is above all names.”⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius likewise writes, “the inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process . . . Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name.”⁶ Cyril concurs, “we cannot endure even His name.”⁷ God lives apart from all names that can be applied.⁸ The principle of unknowability acts as a safeguard reaffirming the greatness, holiness, and transcendent hiddenness of the God of Jesus Christ. It checks the intellectual vanity – and in some cases apathy – of the theologian, who, while treating the subject of God, is always in danger of treating God as a subject. Cyril must remind himself, “if I were to become all tongue, not even then could I speak of Him adequately.”⁹

Faithful believers and professional theologians are left to ponder how to speak of God in accordance with the *docta ignorantia*. “Who then are you, my God?”¹⁰ Is the possibility of any true speech about God excluded? To what does the word “God” refer? Cyril of Jerusalem offers a uniquely insightful and balanced approach to

³ For a small selection of contemporary surveys of the matter, see Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, translated by Alexander Dru (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1965, 1996); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vols. 1 and 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, 1974); Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Robert L. Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Mark McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge* (New York: Crossroad, 2004); Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴ Justin, 2 *Apologia*, 6. *ANF* 1, p. 190.

⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, 12.1. *NPNF* 2.5, p. 241.

⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 1.1. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 50.

⁷ Cyril, *Cat.* 6.9.

⁸ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4.20.6, *ANF* 1, p. 489; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 28.4 in *On God and Christ*, translated by Frederick Williams (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), p. 39; Thomas Aquinas, *S. T.*, I.13.1–12.

⁹ Cyril, *Cat.* 6.10.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* 1.4., translated by Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 4. See Ps. 18:31.

answering this question, one that both reflects biblical revelation and preserves Trinitarian mystery. This article will focus on his contribution with the aim of renewing and extending Cyril's position by appealing to the contemporary philosopher of language, Saul Kripke, and his concept of rigid designators.

Cyril's Generic Trinity

Cyril delivered a series of catechetical lectures to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem at a critical moment in history, about the year 349.¹¹ The timing of the lectures was important for a number of reasons. The Council of Nicaea and its Creed had vindicated the homoousian camp in 325 – of which Cyril's own predecessor, Macarius, had been a chief member. But, it had not eradicated the opposition camps nor had it fully convinced the broader population of the correctness of the Nicene language of *homoousios*. A series of Arian and semi-Arian conferences were held in the mid-300s, for instance at Antioch (341), Philippopolis (343), Sirmium (357), Ancyra (358), and Nicé (359) in the attempt to mediate the extreme, uncompromising position of Nicaea. One result of these conferences was a revival of the homoiousian position promoting *likeness* between God the Father and Son while resisting an exact consubstantial identification of Father and Son. This position garnered significant support from diverse quarters because it signaled the exciting possibility of an acceptable compromise with the Nicene camp for the sake of church unity. But for others it signaled the calamitous erosion of orthodoxy. Jerome quipped with a touch of bitterness, "The whole world groaned and marveled to find itself Arian."¹²

Cyril himself took a mediating, irenic stance between the extreme factions of Nicene faithfuls and anti-Nicene detractors while avoiding the homoousian compromise. By the year 381, it is true that he accepted the homoousian formula when he attended the Council of Constantinople, but his motivations for doing so seem to have less to do with an upsurge of enthusiasm for the term and more to do with a realistic resignation – an admittance that no better term existed. The Arian heresy of *heteroousios* was, without question, unacceptable; *homoiousios* likewise failed to meet the test of orthodoxy. But *homoousios*, while orthodox, seemed too restrictive and divisive to permit healthy theological discussion in the security of ecclesial

¹¹ On Cyril's life, see Jan Willem Drijvers, *Cyril of Jerusalem: Bishop and City* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2004) and Edward Yarnell, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹² Jerome, *Dialogue with Lucif.* 19, quoted in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1960, 1978), p. 238.

unity. In his catechetical lectures of 349, he does not use the term, preferring other ways of expressing the orthodox position.

The Son, then, is Very God, having the Father in Himself, but not changed into the Father; for the Father was not made man, but the Son. For let the truth be freely spoken: the Father did not suffer for us Himself, but sent Him who suffered. Let us beware either of saying that there was a time when the Son did not exist, or identifying the Son with the Father. Rather let us walk in the King's highway, turning aside neither to the right nor to the left.¹³

The narrow path of the King's highway, meditating between one or another extreme, did not win Cyril many friends – he suffered deposition by his superior, the metropolitan of Caesarea, condemnation by a council that met at Constantinople in 360, and banishment by the Arian Emperor Valens (367).

But, we may well ask, what is this royal road? How does Cyril conceive the Trinitarian relation of Father, Son, and Spirit within the Godhead? The traditional interpretation of Cyril places him within a social Trinitarian framework. But, this needs to be qualified in an important way. Cyril takes what is more appropriately termed a *generic* view of unity, a term employed by Anthony Stephenson in the introductory notes to his translation of Cyril's lectures.¹⁴ According to Stephenson's interpretation of St. Cyril, the label "God" indicates genus while the names Father, Son, and Spirit indicate three subsistent species of that genus. For instance, *Rana clamitans* identifies a green frog, where *Rana* is the genus (frog) and *clamitans* is the species (green). *Rana catesbeiana* names a bullfrog and *Rana heckscheri* names a river frog. So identifying "God the Father" provides a way of naming the *genus* and *species*. Father, Son, and Spirit do *not* name three distinct individual entities – three separate beings with different wills, memories, and personalities. Rather, they name three distinct species, or ways of being the one God.

Stephenson draws his own illustration not from the realm of nature but from triangles and angels. Isosceles, scalene, and equilateral share a common triangularity, though they are different types of triangles. Likewise a Cherub and Seraph share a common angelic nature, though they differ in type or kind.¹⁵ His reasoning on the nature of angelic beings comes from St. Thomas Aquinas, who argues as follows:

[S]uch things as agree in species but differ in number, agree in form, but are distinguished materially. If, therefore, the angels be not

¹³ Cyril, *Cat.* 11.17.

¹⁴ Anthony Stephenson, "General Introduction," *St. Cyril of Jerusalem, The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 60, pp. 42–3.

¹⁵ Stephenson, "Introduction," p. 43.

composed of matter and form, as was said above, it follows that it is impossible for two angels to be of one species; just as it would be impossible for there to be several whitenesses apart, or several humanities, since whitenesses are not several, except in so far as they are in several substances. And if the angels had matter, not even then could there be several angels of one species. For it would be necessary for matter to be the principle of distinction of one from the other, not, indeed, according to the division of quantity, since they are incorporeal, but according to the diversity of their powers; and such diversity of matter causes diversity not merely of species, but of genus.¹⁶

Since angels are immaterial and incorporeal, they have no form, and so cannot be individuated as separate beings within a certain class of species the way that Peter, Paul, and John can be listed as three individual examples of the human species. Therefore, Thomas reasons, each angel constitutes its own species under the over-arching category: angel. The differences must be accounted for not at the specific level of individuation, but at the generic level. Stephenson extends Thomas's logic to the Trinity. "On this logic Father, Son and Holy Ghost will be three different ways of being God," Stephenson suggests. "While each will be God in the proper and true sense, They will be God in the same generic sense, but not in the same specific sense."¹⁷

The creative and protective power of the Father, the redemptive incarnation of the Son, and the nourishing love of the Spirit – these make up something like three species of the one Almighty, Eternal, Unfathomable Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. According to Cyril, the Father is "one," the Son is another "one," and the Spirit a third "one," and all three together are "one" God. Unity is maintained in diversity. "For there is one God, the Father of Christ, and One Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of the One God, and One Holy Spirit who sanctifies and deifies all, who spoke in the Law and the Prophets, both in the Old and New Testaments."¹⁸ Each is "one" within the "one." Just as common characteristics and distinguishing features of different species of animals might be discussed in general ways, so comparison and contrast can be made within the Trinity without being committed to the view that its members are distinct individuals.

Two cautions must be addressed at this juncture: the first has to do with describing God "in" a genus, and the second has to do with describing the Father, Son, and Spirit as subordinate, sub-numbered species. With regards to the first caution, Thomas himself does not apply the logic used on angelic beings to the Trinity, partly because

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *S.T.* I.50.4.

¹⁷ Stephenson, "Introduction," p. 43, capitalization his.

¹⁸ Cyril, *Cat.* 4.16.

he does not want to treat the holy persons of the Godhead as if they were on par with other angelic beings. Indeed, St. Thomas argues that God cannot be subsumed under any genus. “Genus is prior in meaning to what it contains. But nothing is prior to God either really or in meaning.”¹⁹ Thomas’s difficulty in his fifth article of the third question of the *Summa* has to do with “Whether God is contained in a genus?”, that is, whether the “being” of the Godhead can be located within a class of other things. Because he answers in the negative on this point, he rejects altogether the nomenclature of genus-species applied to God. However, his trepidation seems misplaced. Using the logic of the preceding fourth article, in which Thomas argues that essence and being are the same in God and that “God is not only His own essence, as has been shown, but also His own being,”²⁰ he might just as easily assert that the being of God does not belong *in* a genus but is its *own* genus. There is a difference between being in a genus and being a genus; the latter is advocated in the present paper while the former is rejected.

The second caution concerns not so much the use of “genus” but of “species.” Is there any ranking implied between the “species” of the Godhead? In his *De Spiritu Sancto*, St. Basil provides an important warning.²¹ The analogy should be rejected if it implies any sort of “sub-numeration.” Basil confronts those who propose to rank the Spirit under the Son, and the Son under the Father:

Do you maintain that the Son is numbered under the Father, and the Spirit under the Son, or do you confine your sub-numeration to the Spirit alone? If, on the other hand, you apply this sub-numeration also to the Son, you revive what is the same impious doctrine, the unlikeness of the substance, the lowliness of rank, the coming into being in later time, and once for all, by this one term, you will plainly again set circling all the blasphemies against the Only-begotten If on the other hand they suppose the sub-numeration to benefit the Spirit alone, they must be taught that the Spirit is spoken of together with the Lord in precisely the same manner in which the Son is spoken of with the Father. The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is delivered in like manner, and, according to the co-ordination of words delivered in baptism, the relation of the Spirit to the Son is the same as that of the Son to the Father. And if the Spirit is co-ordinate with the Son, and the Son with the Father, it is obvious that the Spirit is also co-ordinate with the Father.²²

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *S. T.*, I.3.5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I.3.4.

²¹ Nathan Jacobs, “On ‘Not Three Gods’ – Again: Can a Primary-Secondary Substance Reading of *Ousia* and *Hypostasis* Avoid Tritheism?” *Modern Theology* 24.3 (July 2008), pp. 331–58.

²² Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 17.43. *NPNF* 2.8, pp. 26–7.

If Father, Son, and Spirit are species of God, they are of equal stature. One is not derivative of the other, nor is one closer to the true genus of God than another. There is no ranking or chain of being within the triune Godhead.

Further clarity will be added to Cyril's generic view when it is distinguished from two other alternatives: the specific and the numeric.

Specific and Numeric Analogies

Stephenson differentiates the generic understanding of the Trinity, which he identifies with Cyril's position, from two other possible positions: the specific and the numeric.²³ The *specific* analogy holds that Father, Son, and Spirit represent three individuals of the same species. The label "God" names the species while "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" name three individual instances of that species just as Peter, James, and John give us three individual examples of the *homo-sapiens* species. This position is ultimately untenable because it inescapably reduces to tritheism.²⁴ If there are three individual beings in the Godhead, then God consists of a community of three wills, three memories, three personalities, three tasks. Cyril insists, however,

that we have a God, a God who is One, a God who is, who is eternal, who is ever the self-same . . . who is honored under many names, is all-powerful, and uniform in substance. For although He is called God, and Just and Omnipotent, and Sabaoth, this does not mean He is diverse; but being One and the same, He fathers the countless operations of the Godhead.²⁵

Whereas the actions are manifold, the divine Doer of the actions is one. Whereas the honorary titles are many, the referent is singular.

So much for the specific view of Trinitarian unity. The *numeric* analogy, by contrast, argues that the divine persons numerically share the same nature – they have one and the same substance and identity. While the Persons of Father, Son, and Spirit can be distinguished in revelation and worship, they are each identical with the same thing, in truth the same substance, *homoousios*. This view is the one that triumphed, first at Nicaea, then at Constantinople in 381, and most definitively in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, which expressly

²³ Stephenson, "General Introduction," pp. 42–3.

²⁴ "For we do not count by way of addition, gradually making increase from unity to multitude, and saying one, two, and three,—nor yet first, second, and third." Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 18.45. *NPNF* 2.8, p. 29.

²⁵ Cyril, *Cat.* 6.7.

stated *una summa res* (“one supreme thing”).²⁶ The numeric understanding of the unity of God – that the Father, Son, and Spirit share the same substance or essence and that distinctions can be made only in relational terms, not in substantial ones – has been and remains to this day the dominant understanding among the Christian faithful.

But, if the specific analogy suffers from the charge of tritheism or at least an over-extended pluralism, then the numeric analogy suffers from the opposite problem, a proclivity towards modalism, or even worse, unitarianism. It meets the test of orthodoxy, but its greatest strength proves to be its greatest weakness as well: clarity and precision. Protecting the mystery of the triune unity becomes arduous when that unity is defined in precise, numeric terms. In what sense can a real Trinity be affirmed if nothing, ontologically speaking, distinguishes the persons of the Trinity? For Cyril, monotheism is not worth achieving at the cost of trinitarianism.²⁷ He instructs his catechumens against a numeric understanding of the Trinity. According to Cyril: “[Christ] did not say, ‘I and the Father am one,’ but ‘I and the Father are one.’”²⁸ Jesus did not claim to be the Father, but rather said that “The Father is in me, and I am in the Father.” Father and Son are emphatically one, “one in dignity,” “one in the prerogative of their kingdom,” “There is no discord or division between them,” “there are not some things created by Christ and others by the Father.”²⁹ Nevertheless, the Son is not the Father; the two are not interchangeable. Nor is the Spirit interchangeable with Father and Son. Cyril writes, “[The Holy Spirit] heralded Christ in the Prophets; He wrought in the Apostles; and to this day He seals souls in Baptism. The Father gives to the Son, and the Son shares with the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ Even so, it must be reiterated, “The gifts of the Father are not different from the gifts of the Son or those of the Holy Spirit. For there is one Salvation, one Power, one Faith. There is one God, the Father; one Lord, His Only-begotten Son; One Holy Spirit, the Advocate.”³¹

Basil agrees with Cyril’s verdict and makes the crucial observation, “In delivering the formula of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, our Lord did not connect the gift with number” – be it three, two, or one.³² “Let the unapproachable,” says Basil, “be altogether above and beyond number.”³³ God is not one *thing* anymore than three *things*.

²⁶ Canons I and II, Lateran IV 1215, *Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/latran4.asp> (accessed August 23, 2011).

²⁷ Cyril, *Mystagogiae* 2.4.

²⁸ Cyril, *Cat.* 11.16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.24.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 18.44. *NPNF* 2.8, p. 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18.44

Cyril's *generic* view offers something more substantive than the numeric view and less extreme than the specific view: it affirms that there are three *ways* of being God – not three *beings* or one *being* with three faces, but three ways of being one. In Cyril's words, "Never let us say: There was a time when the Son was not; nor let us accept the identification of the Son with Father . . . Let us neither separate nor confuse Father and Son" and Spirit.³⁴ Divisions within the Trinity can be made for heuristic purposes only, and do not imply real and material divisions.

Though the discourses on the Holy Spirit are divided, He Himself is undivided, being one and the same. In discoursing on the Father at one time we gave the doctrine on His royal sovereignty, and at another how He is Father, or Almighty, and then how He is Creator of all things; yet the division of lectures implied no division of faith, since the object of devotion was and is One; in discoursing on the Only-begotten Son of God also, at one time we taught the doctrine of His Godhead, and at another His Manhood, and though we divided our teaching on our Lord Jesus Christ into many discourses, we preached undivided faith in Him.³⁵

Kripke's Rigid Designators

This section of the article will attempt to re-present and defend Cyril's trinitarianism, whether we call it "generic" or something else, like "social" or "plural." The defense does not come from any source that would have been readily available to Cyril, but rather from the contemporary philosophical study of language. A complimentary model to Cyril's Trinitarian formulations can be found in Saul Kripke's idea of rigid designators.

Kripke, now professor emeritus at Princeton, delivered a remarkable series of lectures at Harvard University in the early 1970s that gave shape and form to the philosophy of language. At the heart of those lectures, published under the title, *Naming and Necessity*, is the idea that certain words rigidly designate. "Let's call something a rigid designator if in every possible world it designates the same object."³⁶ Some words are guaranteed to refer to the same thing in any possible world. What kinds of words have such stability? Indexicals, proper names, and natural kinds.

Indexicals, the first type of rigid designators, are demonstratives like "this," "that," "there," "here." Indexicals rigidly designate objects

³⁴ Cyril, *Cat.* 11.18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.2.

³⁶ Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 48.

to which they refer. Kripke explains them as verbal pointers. When I say, “*this* room,” I mean *this* very room in every possible world in which this room can exist. This first type of rigid designator best applies to a *specific* understanding of the Trinity, in which “God” is a tag for the species and “Father, Son, and Spirit” label the individual members of that species. That is to say, the word “God” functions as an indexical in the sense that it points out in every possible world *this*. When we ask, “*this* what?” we receive the indexical qualification: “this Father, this Son, and this Spirit.” The word “God” expresses for the Christian a primitive “thisness” – a haecceity or quiddity, to use scholastic terminology.³⁷ The “thisness” of God is specific and individual, like an indexical pointing to a set of three objects.

Rigid designators can also be proper names. Kripke uses the example of Richard Nixon. Although all the facts of Nixon’s life are contingent and provisional – they could have been different – Nixon could not have *not* been himself.³⁸ Even if we were to talk about a hypothetical world in which Nixon is called Vixon, and was not a president but a farmer, we would nevertheless start with an actual fixed reference, Nixon, and then move on to other hypothetical possibilities.³⁹ The name Richard Nixon rigidly designates. This second type of rigid designator, that of proper names, best applies to a *numerical* understanding of the Trinity, in which the word “God” functions like a proper name. “God” identifies one individual substance and being, to which Father, Son, and Spirit are all identical. “God” names one personal entity, an entity who also goes by the titles “Father, Son, and Spirit.” In the final analysis, there is one proper name, “God,” with three sub-names or supporting appellations.

The third type of rigid designator, according to Kripke, is the natural kind. A natural kind is best defined by way of an example, like water – a clear, colorless, tasteless liquid needed by all living things. The qualities, uses, and benefits of water can be enumerated at great length, but fundamentally, water is H₂O. In every possible world, water consists of the molecular structure of two hydrogen and one oxygen. It is a natural kind. Gold, iron, salt, sugar, magnesium sulfate, and so forth are also natural kinds.⁴⁰ They are not proper names or indexicals, but nonetheless, they rigidly designate. This third type of

³⁷ Dale Jacquette, “Haecceity,” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 359–60.

³⁸ On this point, see Scott Soames, *Beyond Rigidity: The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁹ Kripke, *Naming*, p. 53.

⁴⁰ Nathan Salmon, “Are General Terms Rigid?” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 28.1 (2005), pp. 117–34; Joseph LaPorte, “Rigidity and Kind,” *Philosophical Studies* 97.3 (2000), pp. 293–316; Chang-Seong Hong, “Natural Kinds and the Identity of Property,” *Teorema* 17.1 (1998), pp. 89–98; Monte Cook, “If ‘Cat’ is a Rigid Designator, What does it Designate?” *Philosophical Studies* 37 (1980), pp. 61–4.

rigid designator seems to best fit with a *generic* understanding of the Trinity. Under this framework, the word “God” functions not so much like a proper name but more like a natural kind. “God” designates the genus of that natural kind, and “Father, Son, and Spirit” name distinct species (but not isolatable individuals) of that genus.

Kripke’s explanation of how natural kinds operate as rigid designators is lengthy, but at the heart of it is the affirmation that “in the case of natural kinds, certain properties, believed to be at least roughly characteristic of the kind and believed to apply to the original sample, are used to place new items, outside the original sample, in the kind.”⁴¹ The defining phrase in this quotation is “certain properties”; natural kinds share certain characteristic properties that essentially link them.⁴²

“God” is a *sui generis* natural kind. Within the sphere of Christian theology, at least, “God” identifies a natural kind whose qualities can be enumerated even if God’s exact molecular structure cannot. This *sui generis* natural kind can be described as eternal, immutable, omniscient, almighty, benevolent, creative, and so forth, and yet cannot be scientifically catalogued or materially demonstrated. Precisely because God is a *sui generis* natural kind, God’s identity cannot be reduced to a list of essential attributes and eternal properties.

University of Helsinki professor, Heikki Kirjavainen, cannot accept “God” as a rigid designator because the term serves as little more than “a tag that guarantees that we speak about the same individual in all possible worlds. This may be satisfying some actually very strict metaphysical needs, but it does not help much for identifying God in any typical religious sense.”⁴³ To a point, Kirjavainen is correct. The tag “God” is contentless if it is an indexical, a mere verbal pointer to some nebulous metaphysical reality. If “God” is a proper name, the problem is just the opposite. Instead of too little content, the term has too much. Muslims, Jews, Christians, atheists, and politicians can claim the *name* of God or Allah for their own purposes and fill the name with different content.⁴⁴ If “God” is the proper name of a discrete individual, then, one must wonder, who is that individual? What is his or her history? What are his or her actions and qualities and temperament? Different groups will answer differently, using the proper name “God” but speaking of radically different entities.

⁴¹ Kripke, *Naming*, p. 136.

⁴² Bernard Linsky, “General Terms as Rigid Designators,” *Philosophical Studies* 128 (Spring 2006), pp. 655–67, esp. 656.

⁴³ Heikki Kirjavainen, “How is God-Talk Logically Possible? A Sketch for an Argument on the Logic of ‘God’” *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 64 (2008), p. 80.

⁴⁴ Kripke wonders if “God” is, in all actuality, a proper name or a description. He does not resolve the dilemma. *Naming*, pp. 26–7.

The conception of “God” as a rigid designator can be redeemed if it is conceived as a natural kind. The “certain properties” that characterize this peculiar natural kind are three: Fatherhood, Sonship, and Spiration. In a sense, God is a unique and unrepeatable class of three species. God’s defining characteristics or essential nature cannot be captured by a list of attributes like eternal, omniscient, or omnipotent. Instead, speaking economically, it should be said that the Trinity expresses the threefold revelation of God’s presence and care for humanity. The One who fathers the world enters the world as a son in order to breathe new life and spirit. Speaking immanently, the Trinity articulates God’s self as Father who eternally begets and sends the Son who shares in the glory and mission of the Spirit: three ways of being one kind of being, a triple *hypostasis* of the unique *ousia*, a threefold participation in the united and ineffable Godhead, three equal mirrorings of one glorious light.

The classical philosopher of religious language, Ian Ramsey, proposed a similar idea in 1957 when he made the comparison between the “formula” for “God” (the hypostatic union of Father-Son-Spirit) and the chemical formula for benzene (C₆H₆).⁴⁵ Ramsey rightly sensed an immediate danger in his comparison: does it not come close to formalizing, formulizing, and thereby dissolving the mystery of the Trinity? The relations between Father-Son-Spirit and the carbon-hydrogen of benzene are marked by “resemblance,” not homogeneity.⁴⁶ The analogy is serviceable as long as it is remembered that “the logical status of ‘God’ is unique.”⁴⁷

Human language is incapable of isolating and containing divinity; instead, as Ludwig Wittgenstein says, our language is capable of pointing and gesturing. Wittgenstein wonders, “How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God? And just the same goes for the Trinity.” He answers, “[Theology] gesticulates [*fuchtel*] with words, as one might say, because it wants to say something and does not know how to express it.”⁴⁸ Biblical revelation provides theology with the “want to say something”; revelation provides faith with the fertile soil of Trinitarian language. The witness of Holy Scripture produces the impulse to say something, the need to gesticulate and testify. And yet, human frailty forever “does not know how to express it.” Cyril’s generic understanding of the Trinity provides a means of confessing belief in the

⁴⁵ Ian Ramsey, *Religious Language* (New York: MacMillan 1957, 1963), p. 202.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 202–3.

⁴⁷ Ian Ramsey, *Christian Discourse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 83.

⁴⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, translated by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 85.

God-in-three-who-is-but-one without reducing divinity to a single species or dividing it into a set of singular individuals.⁴⁹

The Function of Language

In *Catechesis* VI, Cyril hints at his own philosophy of language as he ponders a rationale for doing theology in the face of God's evident incomprehensibility. The passage is worth quoting at length:

But someone will say: if the Divine Nature is incomprehensible, then why do you discourse about these things? Well then, because I cannot drink up the whole stream, am I not even to take in proportion to my need? Or because I cannot take in all the sunlight owing to the constitution of my eyes, am I not even to gaze upon what is sufficient for my wants? On entering a vast orchard, because I cannot eat all the fruit therein, would you have me go away completely hungry? I praise and glorify Him who made us; for it is a divine command which says: 'Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!' I am endeavoring now to glorify the Lord, not to describe Him, though I know that I shall fall short of glorifying Him worthily; still I consider it a godly work to try all the same.⁵⁰

Methodologically, Cyril aims not to describe, but to glorify – “I am endeavoring now to glorify the Lord, not to describe Him.” His philosophy of language derives from the aesthetics of adoration, not from the observations of science. He does not consider analytical explanation or scientific classification within his purview. It should be noted that he does not thereby conclude, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”⁵¹ Instead, “though I know that I shall fall short of glorifying Him worthily; still I consider it a godly work to try all the same.” Despite the fact that complete comprehension of the divine interworking is not open to him, he is nevertheless obliged to the mystery (*mysterion/sacramentum*). He feels compelled to bow. He cannot describe, but he can designate. While he cannot touch or hold the holy incomprehensibility, he can direct the gaze of his audience toward it. “You have seen His power, exercised throughout the world. Tarry no longer on the earth, but mount on high.”⁵² Language leads to liturgy; the path of theology circles back to its starting point in worship.

⁴⁹ Cyril, *Cat.* 4.8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.5.

⁵¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by C. K. Ogden (Mineola: Dover, 1922, 1999), p. 108.

⁵² Cyril, *Cat.* 16.23.

This article has attempted to update, renew, and defend the orthodoxy of Cyril of Jerusalem's generic view of the Trinity by redescribing it in terms of Saul Kripke's rigid designators. Cast in the light of natural kind rigid designators, the analogy of genus and species indicates the mystical relations within the threefold God. If successful, the analogy brings us no closer to explaining the mystery of the Trinity, but perhaps closer to speaking faithfully of the one who is three in one.

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