The epistemic role of language on the belief about trinity and incarnation

El papel epistémico del lenguaje en la creencia acerca de la Trinidad y la Encarnación

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Abstract

This paper reflects about the Incarnation of Jesus, the God-Son. It considers the hermeneutics differences between a metaphorical versus an historical reading, and how this metaphorical via might discards the historical character, the event of God made flesh. This is an ontological problem. At the same time, it is reflected on the role of the notion of mystery and the scope it has to believing in the Incarnation. That is, admitting an inherent epistemic limit as finite beings but at the same time making viable that the believer gradually understands what he believes, even if not fully. This constitutes an epistemic problem. Finally, it is pondered the role of language as a way of access and transmission of knowledge about the divine and sacred, emphasizing the role of the names used to refer to the God-Father, the God-Son and the Holy Spirit, considering their logical implications.

Keywords: *Incarnation, God-Son, Trinity, Language, Logic.*

Resumen

El presente artículo analiza algunos aspectos relevantes de la Encarnación de Jesús, el Hijo de Dios. Considera la tensión entre interpretaciones a favor de una lectura metafórica y el problema que implica que esto descarte el carácter histórico, el evento de Dios hecho carne. Este es un problema

ontológico. Al mismo tiempo, reflexiona sobre el papel de la noción de misterio y el alcance que tiene para creer en la Encarnación, es decir, admitir un límite epistémico inherente como seres finitos pero al mismo tiempo hacer viable que el creyente comprenda gradualmente lo que cree, aunque no sea completamente. Esto constituye un borde epistémico. De la misma manera, se evalúa el papel del lenguaje como medio de acceso y transmisión del conocimiento sobre lo divino y sagrado, enfatizando el papel de los nombres utilizados para referirse a Dios Padre, Dios Hijo y Espíritu Santo, considerando sus implicaciones lógicas.

Palabras clave: *encarnación, Hijo de Dios, Trinidad, lenguaje, lógica.*

1. Introduction

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"[1] (John 1:1)

The belief in the Trinity, as well as the belief in the Incarnation, are a fundamental part of the religious beliefs in which the Judeo-Christian tradition is framed. Both beliefs can be stated in a relatively simple way through statements of an apodictic character, necessarily true and in that sense not dependent on the context in which they are expressed. Thus, we observe about the Trinity in the Apostles Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty

in Jesus Christ, His only Son Our Lord

I believe in the Holy Spirit

And about the Incarnation:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

It is a consequence that benefits the internal coherence of beliefs that are not mutually exclusive, but compossible and necessarily true. The focus here is not to develop a comparison

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[1] See Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023): "In the first chapter of The Gospel According to John, Jesus Christ is identified as "the Word" (Greek logos) incarnated, or made flesh. This identification of Jesus with the logos is based on Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) concepts of revelation, such as occurs in the frequently used phrase "the Word of the Lord"-which connoted ideas of God's activity and power-and the Jewish view that Wisdom is the divine agent that draws humans to God and is identified with the word of God. The author of The Gospel According to John used this philosophical expression, which easily would be recognizable to readers in the Hellenistic (Greek cultural) world, to emphasize the redemptive character of the person of Christ, whom the author describes as "the way, and the truth, and the life." Just as the Jews had viewed the Torah (the Law) as preexistent with God, so also the author of John viewed Jesus, but Jesus came to be regarded as the personified source of life and illumination of humankind. St. John interprets the logos as inseparable from the person of Jesus and does not simply imply that the logos is the revelation that Jesus proclaims".

between different religious creeds, but to evaluate the epistemic, metaphysical and semantic scope of the belief in the Incarnation and the Trinity. The internal coherence between what is expressed is central.

The potential tensions between these beliefs are synthesized as follows by Baber (2023):

Christians believe that God is a Trinity of Persons, each omnipotent, omniscient and wholly benevolent, co-equal and fully divine. There are not three gods, however, but one God in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Prima facie, the doctrine more commonly known as the Trinity seems gratuitous: why multiply divine beings beyond necessity—especially since one God is hard enough to believe in? For Christians, however, the Trinity doctrine is neither gratuitous nor unmotivated. Claims about Christ's divinity are difficult to reconcile with the Christian doctrine that there is just one God: Trinitarian theology is an attempt to square the Christian conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, fully divine yet distinct from his Father, with the Christian commitment to monotheism. Nevertheless, while the Trinity doctrine purports to solve a range of theological puzzles it poses a number of intriguing logical difficulties akin to those suggested by the identity of spatio-temporal objects through time and across worlds, puzzle cases of personal identity, and problems of identity and constitution.

Of course, it is not that the belief in the Trinity has its foundation in the search for a natural explanatory way about the divine and human existence of Jesus, God-Son: it is a presupposition of these religious beliefs that a naturalistic position does not consider the transcendent and supernatural phenomenon inherent in these religious beliefs. On this point, Visala (2018) has developed an analysis that puts in tension the theoretical presuppositions of a naturalistic position regarding the religious. A naturalistic position rules out the existence of supra-natural causal factors as an explanatory pathway for certain facts, phenomena and/or individual or collective doxastic attitudes (S believes p, Group g believes p). This being the standard position of a naturalist, it is worth asking whether this position allows for what is called explanatory pluralism, meaning the possibility that a phenomenon, fact or doxastic attitude can be explained in different ways, each of them epistemically valid. The distinction between scientific explanations and non-scientific explanations is central to a naturalistic position, only those explanations that are scientific in nature are considered as epistemically valid in this explanatory pluralism. Visala's position is framed from the cognitive sciences, the so called cognitive evolutionary study of religion, one of its main objectives being "to provide a scientific perspective on the study of religion (as well as on humanities and social sciences in general)" (Visala 2018, p.52). This position implies the a priori discarding of "non-natural explanatory factors" (Visala 2018, p.52), an assumption that rules out an aspect that is understood as central for example from a Christian position: the transcendent character of God. From this perspective, it is then worth asking whether naturalism is a position inherently non-believing, i.e if presupposes a basic atheism or agnosticism.

What is relevant in evaluating these non-theistic commitments is that

i) it rules out metaphysical neutrality, since in both cases a position is taken based on the absence of

evidence (from the non-believing positions).

ii) it rules out epistemic non-access, since the naturalistic posture proposes ways of explanation that presuppose epistemic access to the phenomenon, fact or doxastic attitude under discussion.

The discussion regarding the role that a religious belief should have, and the requirement that such beliefs should not influence the definition of what should be prohibited or permitted, present an epistemic assumption:

iii) a secular stance has a comparative advantage, neutrality, in relation to a religious stance.

It is not clear whether that assumption is correct or epistemically valid. At least it seems prudent to rule out that a religious belief corresponds to a case of a false justified belief, close to the perspectivist case of a subject S believing P, because P is the best alternative S has considering the (limited) information available. Strategies of this type of claim that secular neutrality is an ethically superior position to religious neutrality. Likewise, the appeal to ignorance or error does not prevent unjustified rational errors, which would lead to discarding objectivity in the definition of what is correct. Neutrality in the religious sphere that attempts to ground a secular stance does not rest on ignorance of this kind, but rather on an arbitrary dismissal of the validity of religious reasons. The central problem for the secular stance is in what sense being neutral requires it to exclude religious beliefs as valid criteria of normative determination. It seems that the dilemma in this situation is the conjunction rational belief - religious belief, because it is assumed a rational religious belief would oppose the alluded neutrality.

Thus, for example, Corine Besson (2018) has analyzed what it means that our reasoning is governed by epistemic principles, and what these would be. These principles would define what a subject S rationally or with rational correctness believes, and subsequently the actions s/he should perform in a way that is consistent with his beliefs. In the public sphere, it has been questioned whether certain beliefs, religious beliefs, should influence decisions that affect not only individuals who believe in them, but also non-believers. But this question is not bidirectional: it is not posited that the secular position commits a similar "epistemic mistake". Analogous cases of this type of tension are found in various discussions, without this leading to the discarding of its incidence in the public sphere. For example, Manfred Svensson (2016) states:

> An argument of religious origin would constitute an unjustified demand before the remaining citizens. One may of course ask why such a restriction would have to be posed to the arguments of believing citizens: being exposed to reasoning whose rewards we do not accept is a usual phenomenon for all citizens (or at least for all those who reflect on the premises of what they are told), not something that occurs exclusively because of the presence of religious arguments. (p. 252)

Consider as an explanatory hypothesis to this posture before a religious belief that:

(iv) A secular stance attempts to achieve an objectivity or neutrality that religious belief would not allow.

v) It would not be rational to require non-believing subjects to admit a religious belief as a reason to act in a certain way. It would not be rational to require the non-believer to accept religious reasons as valid in the public sphere.

In the first instance, iv) and v) would be in tension, if it were not stipulated that a religious belief, because it is religious, is not rational. This would be the extreme secular position, since it would be the central basis for affirming that religious belief could not be a reason to act, since it would not be rational. One of the relevant epistemic principles in this discussion is the so-called *warrant*, that the belief is justified in some way. Generally, some evidence E is expected to be a reason for (or against) a subject S believing (or not believing) C. It is precisely this point that a secular stance questions in relation to a religious belief: the apparent lack of empirical evidence in favor of it. While this interpretation of an epistemic principle such as justification is debatable, grant that it is correct. As Besson rightly observes, the lack of empirical evidence would not only affect a religious belief, but also certain logical principles that, implicitly or explicitly, would affect the rationality of certain beliefs. Following Besson's example, a paradigmatic case of this type of principle is Modus Ponens, a deductive logical principle that enunciates the conditional

If $P \rightarrow Q$

and P

Then Q

It is not empirical evidence that determines the correctness or incorrectness of deductions in these cases.

It is in view of contrasting this pro-secularism perspective as being considered more rational than a theistic position, that it becomes relevant to reflect on religious beliefs regarding the Incarnation and the Trinity, and to account for the deep thought processes inherent in that religious doxastic attitude to highlight its internal rationality: they are not gratuitous, irrational or unjustified beliefs.

2. Mystery as an epistemic limit

In 1989, John Hick published an article that discusses the logic of the incarnate God. Following Morris on his book *The Logic of God Incarnate*, Hick establishes as an orthodox position that "Jesus of Nazareth was one and the same person as God the Son, the Second Person of the divine Trinity". This position, following Wood (2022), was defined in ecumenical councils (of Nicaea (325 CE), Constantinople (381), and Chalcedon (451), the Incarnation being in his words the corollary of the doctrine of the Trinity (Kelly, 1978).

The logical discussion of such a statement embraces the notion of compossibility, and how it is instantiable in the person of Jesus from a Christian perspective. The Incarnation then raises the question of whether the human and the divine can be instantiated in Jesus, whether they are

mutually possible, or whether they imply contradiction. In the words of Cross (2009):

> how is it that one and the same thing could be both divine (and thus, on the face of it, necessary, and necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, immutable, impassible, and impeccable) and human (and thus, on the face of it, have the complements of all these properties)? (p.453)

This is what Wood (2022) calls the fundamental problem of Christology: the incompatibility between these properties:

> Christ seems to be both necessarily omniscient, as the divine Son, the second person of the Trinity, and yet also limited in knowledge, as the human man, Jesus of Nazareth-and so on for other divine and human attributes. Yet Christ is one person, not two: he just is the divine Son and he just is Jesus of Nazareth. On standard interpretations of logical consistency, nothing can have logically incompatible properties at the same time and in the same respect.

The emphasis in the way of presenting this problem is the context expressed through the caption "at the same time and in the same respect", since only under these conditions are possible contradictions generated. An alternative, called actional, meaning centered on the relationship between divine and human action, is developed by Gray (1974). This alternative understands the Incarnation not from the notions of nature and/or person, trying to prevent the ontological and logical problems that this would entail. However, it should be kept in mind that a proposal whose emphasis is on relationship and action cannot ignore the relata of that relationship. Gray describes the Incarnation as "the conjunction of God's giving and man's receiving, a conjunction which in turn gives rise to man's giving in imitation of the divine activity" Gray conceives of this explanatory path as an economy of the Trinity, whose focus is on human freedom in its relation to God rather than on the underlying ontology. Such an economy then resides in an ontological minimalism, which may eventually obviate complex questions about the Trinity-Incarnation-Salvation nexus.

Hick defends the position that understands the Incarnation as a religious metaphor, a myth. He considers that this avoids the risk of heresy, a risk that he attributes to those positions that try to explain rationally from metaphysics what allows this relationship between human and divine properties, in such a way that it does not derive in contradiction to sustain the eventual necessary character of both incarnated in Jesus, and not merely as accidental attributes that would attempt against the essential character of the Incarnation. It is important here to consider that the Incarnation occurs historically and not only metaphorically, if one accepts the close link between the Incarnation and the divine salvific plan: the repair of the relationship damaged by the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

Of course, a skeptical position on the historical character might demand that one must then accept the historical character of what is described in Genesis, particularly the account regarding original sin. While it is not the focus of this paper, it is important to keep in mind the logical correlation between discarding the metaphorical character of the Incarnation (for in that case it strictly does not happen that p) and the link with salvation and the repair of the relationship with

God that it is intended to correct, and whether or not that which is intended to be corrected (the damaged relationship with God) is metaphorical. For Frye (1964), this path puts at risk the understanding of the Incarnation with all its metaphysical weight and its impact on human life, he states: "Only by holding steadily and honestly to the Gospel of the Incarnation, with its inseparable juncture of nature and grace, reason and revelation, life here and hereafter, can the church truly be the church as God's mission in a divided world."

The Incarnation implies that God, Jesus, is fully man and fully God, which is usually referred to from a philosophical perspective under the term hypostasis (ὑπόστασις). The understanding of the Incarnation as an event, as a historical fact, is not without dispute. This can be seen in the beginning of Rudolf Bultmann's *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (1960), in which the historical character of supranatural phenomena is ruled out, since history understood from a modern perspective "does not take into account any intervention of God...in the course of history" (p.15). Bultmann (1960) takes the scope of this mythological and eschatological perspective a step further, stating:

> The preaching of New Testament proclaims Jesus Christ (...) which was mythologized from the very beginnings of earliest Christianity. New Testament scholars are at variance as to whether Jesus himself claimed to be the Messiah (...) whether he believed himself to be the Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven. Is so, Jesus understood himself in the light of mythology". (p.16)

What is problematic about this understanding, which implies the Incarnation, is that it requires affirming that this did not really happen, neither historically nor physically: that strictly speaking the Incarnation of God did not occur. This mythological interpretation is reaffirmed by being explained as "different from the conception of the world which has been formed and developed by science since its inception in ancient Greece:

> He continues:

> His person is viewed in the light of mythology when he is said to have been begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin...a great, preexistent heavenly being who became man for the sake of our redemption and took on himself suffering, even the suffering of the cross. It is evident that such conceptions are mythological, for they were widespread in the mythologies of Jews and Gentiles and then were transferred to the historical person of Jesus. (pp. 16 -17)

To hold that the Incarnation is a historical fact (that it is the case that x, or that it was the case that x) may require at first an existential commitment that can be verified. This is what Heaney (1980) following Aristotle calls dialectical questions, which in their simplest form admit yes or no answers. To the question of whether the Incarnation is real, once it is determined that there is no ambiguity or polysemy in the use of the concept "incarnation" (that its meaning is clear), it is expected that the answer can be submitted to a verificationist evaluation. Then, the statement "Jesus of Nazareth was one and the same person as God the Son, the Second Person of the divine Trinity" (Hick, 1989, p. 409) can be subjected to a logical evaluation, with a view to substantiating the

compossibility of the divine and the human in Jesus. The presupposition of an inherent contradiction in the Incarnation (from a logical perspective) is a consequence that should be avoided, and should not initially be understood as that which explains the mysterious character of the Incarnation (which would be contradictory to this compossibility precisely because it is a mystery and thus surpasses rational foundations). There are positions that from the so-called paraconsistent logic defend the possibility of true contradictions, the so-called dialetheism) (see Miranda-Rojas, 2013).

The Incarnation is a mystery of faith, which implies that it cannot be fully explained by rational means. According to John's Gospel, Jesus was fully man and fully God simultaneously. This is a mystery that requires faith to believe, but it must be confessed and believed in order to be in Christ (John 14:11; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 1:7). The fulfillment of the prophecies enunciated in the Old Testament can be considered as a proof or evidence that Jesus is God incarnate, but this does not derive in eliminating its character of mystery of faith, mainly because the fulfillment of those prophesied actions is temporally subsequent to the divine incarnation (from the temporal perspective of the believer of course). In parallel, Tuggy (2021) observes a problematic consequence of a position that relegates the role of a mystery (in the framework of the Trinity in that case), a position he calls mysterianism, he argues:

> Mysterianism is a meta-theory of the Trinity, that is, a theory about trinitarian theories, to the effect that an acceptable Trinity theory must, given our present epistemic limitations, to some degree lack understandable content. 'Understandable content' here means propositions expressed by language which the hearer 'grasps' or understands the meaning of, and which seem to her to be consistent. (p.29)

This implies the inherent epistemic limitation of the one who accesses the mystery, but at the same time demands a level of understanding so that the content of the mystery can be believed, so that one can have faith in the Incarnation or the Trinity following the examples[2]. The so-called negative or apophatic theology aspires to emphasize how the mysteries demand a humble epistemic attitude, epistemic humility in the face of what cannot be known except by a negative way. At this point it is worth noting that this position of epistemic humility is not restricted to the religious realm, for this same attitude should be the standard in the realm of the sciences, especially for non-specialists. It is important to emphasize that in this analogy with the scientific field, it is not viable to gain access via negative means to certain knowledge about the object of study, which raises the

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[2] Hence the five meanings that Tuggy makes explicit about the mystery concept:

[1]...a truth formerly unknown, and perhaps undiscoverable by unaided human reason, but which has now been revealed by God and is known to some...
[2] something we don't completely understand...
[3] some fact we can't explain, or can't fully or adequately explain...
[4] an unintelligible doctrine, the meaning of which can't be grasped
[5] a truth which one should believe even though it seems, even after careful reflection, to be impossible and/or contradictory and thus false. (175-6)

question of why in the field of the divine, of transcendent realities, it would be easier to gain access via negative means. Since it seems to be complex to access via negative way to knowledge in the realm of traditional sciences (at least in the sense that they deal with immanent and not transcendent reality), the apophatic way does not seem convincing as a way to approach negatively the divine, hence the divine names (see below) do not describe what God is not but what is, but not all that He is. Indeed, the negative way and its link to the topic of incarnation has been used as a theoretical platform for postmodern proposals that, while legitimate, depart from the phenomenon of incarnation around the relationship of God-Father, God-Son and the Holy Spirit. For example, Boesel and Keller (2009) argue:

> The ancient doctrine of negative theology or apophasis-the attempt to describe God by speaking only of what cannot be said about the divine perfection and goodness-has taken on new life in the concern with language and its limits that preoccupies much postmodern philosophy, theology, and related disciplines. This volume pursues the unlikely conjunction of apophasis and the body, not for the cachet of the cutting edge but rather out of an ethical passion for the integrity of all creaturely bodies as they are caught up in various ideological mechanisms-religious, theological, political, economic-that threaten their dignity and material well-being.

This accusation of ideological position forgets that its own position suffers from the same vice, if it applies to hold it with respect to specific religious doctrines (which is rejected by the writer). The Incarnation, from a theological perspective, is defined as a mystery and as a dogma. As a mystery, it implies that its epistemic access through reason is limited, that its deep meaning cannot be fully apprehended through conceptual and/or theoretical instruments, although they can contribute to a gradual understanding of its possibility and reality. As dogma, the Incarnation implies a normative commitment to its truth value, not depending on that perspective on the epistemic access of a believer A, B or C to determine that it is true that God became flesh. Its unquestionable character, proper to a dogma, does not imply a certain doxastic arbitrariness, the usual focus of criticism of non-believers who, precisely from that negative doxastic position, question or do not understand how something can be true if it is not believed by a specific group of people (the non-believers in this case).

This skepticism that if something is not believed by all, its truth should be distrusted is not a serious epistemic risk, since the objective of the search for truth is not primarily the achievement of a consensus, although this can be expected because of such a search. Thus, as an analogy of lack of consensus, the anti-climate change, anti-vaccine, anti-pandemic and flat earther positions may serve as an analogy: in each case, of course, the plausibility of the position may be discussed, but this absence of consensus does not result in having to maintain that there is no climate change, for example. This epistemic-ontological dependence is false from a realist perspective that affirms the independence of the external world from the mental states of a subject S, for it again assumes that the truthfulness of the Incarnation depends on the epistemic access of a group G or subject S to it. Of course, detaching its truth-value from its epistemic link to the believer sets up a tension as to what is the relevance, ultimately, of a believer's believing in the Incarnation. This is expressed as

follows by *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

> a dogma is now understood to be a truth appertaining to faith or morals, revealed by God, transmitted from the Apostles in the Scriptures or by tradition, and proposed by the Church for the acceptance of the faithful. (Coghlan, 1909)

The main common characteristic that makes the Incarnation both a mystery and a dogma is that it is a revealed truth. On the one hand, the notion of mystery presupposes something that is unknown, and that cannot be accessed through natural reason alone.

> Mystery, therefore, in its strict theological sense is not synonymous with the incomprehensible, since all that we know is incomprehensible, i.e., not adequately comprehensible as to its inner being nor with the unknowable, since many things merely natural are accidentally unknowable, on account of their inaccessibility, e.g., things that are future, remote, or hidden. In its strict sense a mystery is a supernatural truth, one that of its very nature lies above the finite intelligence. (McHugh, 1911)

3. Apparent contradictions: the discarding of a skeptical theistic position

Hick allows us to observe how the crux of this divine-human dichotomy requires us to ask whether Jesus is God and Man under the same predicates: whether that which describes him as God coincides with that which describes him as human, which seems to lead to contradictions such as the following:

> how could anyone have both divine omniscience and human ignorance, divine omnipotence and human weakness, divine goodness and human temptability, divine omnipresence and a finite human body? (Hick, 1989, p.415)

One way of solution involves the impossibility of knowing what is believed, one of the main consequences of the current called theistic skepticism and which has been recently discussed (Miranda, 2019; 2015). However, the consequences against a religious belief of this defense via skepticism suggest avoiding that path. Another possible solution is kenosis, the deprivation of certain divine attributes while maintaining the character of God independent of it, suggesting that the attributes deprived are not essential to being God. For Morris, the attribute of immutability is a property that the divine cannot lack and therefore incarnation is *de facto* impossible. The solution offered by Morris redounds to a duality of at least mental substances: he proposes two minds or two consciousness as a way of conciliation between the divine and the human. Strictly speaking, Morris refers to two ranks of consciousness, not two consciousnesses, which would indicate the contingent character of the distinction. He uses as an analogous case of this asymmetrical relationship between consciousnesses two computer programs:

> Think (...) of two computer programs or informational systems, one containing but not contained by the other. The divine mind had full and direct access to the earthly human experience from the Incarnation, but the earthly consciousness did not have such a full and direct access to the content of the overarching omniscience proper to the Logos. (Hick, 1989, 416)

Hick observes in this approach to the phenomenon of the Incarnation a cognitivist reduction of it, such that the only relevant thing is what can be known asymmetrically. More problematic, this asymmetrical epistemic access assumes that the human Jesus would not be conscious of being the Son of God, which according to the scriptures is false. This reductionism leaves out the emotional edge proper to genuine religious attitudes, for it is not a religious belief a propositional attitude that is only cognitive, nor is it believed (as it has been tried to emphasize) on the basis of evidence, or at least not only on the basis of evidence. In turn, one observes for example in Lee (2020) a link between historical crucifixion, liberationist and the notion of deep incarnation, which explores the supposed analogical character with the suffering of creatures, although at the same time its use is ultimately metaphorical. On the other hand, the so-called hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) relays precisely the communication between divine and human nature, not their separation and disconnection:

> The doctrine maintains that the divine and human natures of Jesus do not exist beside one another in an unconnected way but rather are joined in him in a personal unity that has traditionally been referred to as the hypostatic union. The union of the two natures has not resulted in their diminution or mixture; rather, the identity of each is believed to have been preserved. (Britannica, 2023)

4. Epilogue: logical implications of faith on incarnation and trinity

Following Tuggy (2021), one issue that is relevant to ask is the logical relationship between the Incarnation and the Trinity, particularly if there is any relationship of causal dependence: whether the Incarnation is necessary to affirm the Trinity. The Trinity is understood as "the statement that the one God exists as or in three equally divine "'Persons'," the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." (p. 1) Similar to the Incarnation, the Trinity faces epistemic challenges such as the risk of incoherence between the affirmation of the Trinity and monotheism (If there are three who are equally divine, isn't that to say there are at least three gods? (Tuggy 2021, 1) One way of solution to this problematic is the affirmation that each divine person (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are modes of the same God, triune. This implies numerical identity such that independent of their specific modes and the different names for each,[3] the co-substantial unity of the triune God is maintained. He states on this point:

> Because the New Testament seems to portray the Son and Spirit as somehow subordinate to the one God, one-self Trinity theories always either always reduce Father, Son, and Spirit to modes of the one, triune God, or reduce the Son and Spirit to modes of the Father, who is supposed to be numerically identical to the one God. (Tuggy, 2021, p. 3)

An interesting aspect is that being modes of the same God, these names are co-referential, they refer to the same God although to different modes of the same God. This means that, for

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[3] Brichto, Herbert Chanan (1998). The names of God: poetic readings in biblical beginnings. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-510965-1.

example, only the name Messiah (The Anointed One) can be said of the God-Son, it is a specific name of that divine mode. The description of the anointed one, which could suggest indeterminacy (it will be the God-Son as the one who fulfills the defined description The Anointed One) is only apparently so, since it seems to be necessary according to the prophecies that it must be Jesus who fulfills this description (the same with his birth, his persecution, his passion and resurrection). This aligns with the proposal of rigid designators, whether temporal or not (Kripke, 1980; Leftow 2012).

Understanding a mode as "way a thing is" (which might seem tautological), Tuggy (2021) enunciates at least three understandings of the notion mode:

an intrinsic property of X (e.g., a power of X, an action of X);

a relation that X bears to some thing or things (e.g., X's loving itself, X's being greater than Y, X appearing wonderful to Y and to Z);

a state of affairs or event which includes X (e.g., X loving Y, it being the case that X is great)" (p.4)

Regarding the God-Son, he states that he approaches the third alternative with descriptions such as the following: "The Son is the event of God's relating to us as friend and savior. Or the Son is the event of God's taking on flesh and living and dying to reveal the Father to humankind. Or the Son is the eternal event or state of affairs of God's living in a son-like way." (Tuggy, 2021, p.4) It is interesting to note that some names of God make explicit precisely certain divine properties, thus allowing us to affirm notions such as "God's wisdom" instead of "God is wise". In the case of names, those that describe certain properties and/or relationships abound: *elohim*, The All-Powerful One Creator (Genesis 1:1-3); Jehovah-Rapha, The Lord Who Heals (Psalm 147:3). In the first case, it refers to God's relationship with his creation. In the second, it refers to the property of healing physically, emotionally, and spiritually, characteristics that Jesus carries out in his life (Luke 5: 31,32). Brichto (1998), in his introduction describes the following interpretative and contextual problem:

A second problem is that there is in Hebrew a declinable noun, *elohim*, which appears both as common noun (connoting god, deity, divinity, numen, divine figurine, ancestral spirit or ghost) and as a proper noun, an alternate name for the one-and-only-deity whose most frequently occurring name is the grapheme YHWH. (p.3)

It is important to note that although these names are part of the so-called natural language and not formal or formalized language, this does not lead to the referential use of these terms suffering from the three weaknesses that Romero (2018, 7) enunciates as characteristic of natural languages, namely: vagueness, lack of precision, and ambiguity. In the particular case of the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, it is even decided that it is ineffable and should not be pronounced: "too holy to pronounce" (Brichto 1998, 6). Brichto evokes what is also stated in Deuteronomy 7:9: "YHWH, your god, he [alone] is god" conveys an identificatory redundancy in the usual renderings, "(YHWH) the Lord your God is God." Redundancies of this type do not imply ambiguity or vagueness, but a special emphasis on what is asserted. From the formal perspective

developed by Romero, this is the following logical relation, insofar as there is an identity relationship.

$$(A \equiv B) = (A \rightarrow B) \, \mathsf{A} \, (B \rightarrow A)$$

The modes, Tuggy (2021, p.5) argues, can be essential or accidental. Is the Incarnation essential to the God-Son? While the initial answer is yes, it is worth considering that this is in tension with the eternal character of the God-Son, its pre-existent character and therefore the fact that the Incarnation is partially overlapping in human history is not inconsistent or contradictory with the eternal character of that divine mode, as long as it is clear that the Incarnation is

a necessary event (it must occur that p),

contextually dependent (it occurs at a time t)

and

historically finite (it ceases at a time $t1$) event of the God-Son mode:

There are three ways these modes of an eternal being may be temporally related to one another: maximally overlapping, non-overlapping, or partially overlapping. First, they may be eternally concurrent-such that this being always, or timelessly, has all of them. Second, they may be strictly sequential (non-overlapping): first the being has only one, then only another, then only another. Finally, some of the modes may be had at the same times, partially overlapping in time (Tuggy, 2021, p.6).

The relationship between the Trinity and the Incarnation is clearer if one considers the statement of Karl Barth:

As God is in Himself Father from all eternity, He begets Himself as the Son from all eternity. As He is the Son from all eternity, He is begotten of Himself as the Father from all eternity. In this eternal begetting of Himself and being begotten of Himself, He posits Himself a third time as the Holy Spirit, that is, as the love which unites Himself in Himself. (Barth, 1956, p.1)

It is observed that this relation of God to himself in the first place gives rise to the generation of the modes, with a clear hierarchical relation in which God-Father begets himself but without spatio-temporal limitation, since he is eternal. In view of the Trinity and Incarnation not being misinterpreted as a case of polytheism, three gods instead of one God, the modes fulfill an explanatory role of the relationship of one and only one self: monotheism. The Trinity, similar to the Incarnation, defies certain logical relations that could derive in incoherence, such is the case of the Athanasian creed, enunciated by Tuggy (2021, p.8) from the following diagram:

The stated numerical identity relations imply that there is no single God. Father ≠ Son

Son ≠ Spirit Spirit ≠ Father

And at the same time they presuppose the identity of each one with God. Father = God

Son = God Spirit = God

The above seems incoherent, if it is admitted that the identity relation is transitive (and symmetric following Tuggy), i.e:

If F = G and S = G → F = S

Of course, this may lead one to question not the coherence or incoherence of the position with respect to the Trinity, but rather the theoretical presuppositions of identity relations. Why should the numerical identity relation be transitive and symmetric? An initial answer seems to indicate that, if one rejects the transitivity of numerical identity, the consequence that an object is distinct from itself might follow, which does not seem plausible in the case of numerical identity. In the case of qualitative identity, this consequence is to be expected if its properties change (the so-called temporal persistence problem). In these cases, contradictions or absences of incoherence may lead to hold that this is characteristic of a mystery of faith, a position described by Tuggy (2021) as Mysterianism:

> 'mystery' is used in a merely honorific sense, meaning a great and important truth or thing relating to religion. In this vein it's often said that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery to be adored, rather than a problem to be solved. In the Bible a "mystery" (*musterion*) is simply a truth or thing which is or has been somehow hidden (i.e., rendered unknowable) by God. In this sense a "revealed mystery" is a contradiction in terms. While Paul seems to mainly use "mystery" for what used to be hidden but is now known, it has been argued that Paul assumes that what has been revealed will continue to be in some sense "mysterious. (p.23)

Leftow (2007) proposes a way of solution through the notion of trope, which is fundamentally the instantiation of the same property, an individualized case of an attribute (Leftow 1999, p.203), without implying numerical identity, but allowing at the same time that there is such instantiation and that it implies numerical identity. Thus, Cain and Abel share the attribute humanity without this implying numerical identity between them (Tuggy, 2021, p.23), but in the case of the Trinity it allows to sustain such identity because the attribute of divinity from the monotheistic perspective admits only one instantiation of that attribute. A question that will not be developed in this paper is why three, because the Father-Son-Holy Spirit modes, is sufficient. In view of avoiding the defense of a heretical position, Leftow (2004) argues:

> Nothing in my account of the Trinity precludes saying that the Persons' distinction is an eternal, necessary, non-successive and intrinsic feature of God's life, one which would be there even if there were no creatures. (p. 327)

The fact that certain names are applied to God-Father and not to God-Son, or that certain attributes or properties are enunciated of God-Son and not God-Father (the passion of Christ, for example), is related to the qualitative identity rather than to the numerical identity discussed. Besides this, in order to avoid the theoretical position called patripassianism (the view that the

Father suffers) Leftow observes that: "then claiming that the Father is on the Cross is like claiming that The Newborn [sic] is eligible to join the AARP [an organization for retirees]", that is, true but misleading" (2012b, p. 336)." The abiding care that must be taken not to make heretical claims is palpable[4].

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