

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - CHARLOTTE

MORE THAN INDEPENDENCE:
GOD'S ASEITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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As Moses was tending his flock in the desert of Midian, his life was turned upside down through the encounter of a great paradox: a bush was roaring aflame, but no wood was consumed (Exodus 3).¹ While God spoke to Moses out of the bush, he was, in part, displaying a striking image of his *aseity*.² Aseity, from Latin, literally means that God exists *from himself*. Historically, this doctrine has enjoyed a privileged place in theology proper.³ However, modern theologians like Clark Pinnock, John Cobb, and David Griffin have argued that aseity and other classical doctrines of God are mere imports from Greek Philosophy.⁴ In their view, these doctrines must be jettisoned to truly encounter God as he presents himself in Scripture.⁵ John Sanders agrees and goes further to add what he considers an additional criterion that exposes the doctrine's impotency: it fails to deal with the demands of everyday life.⁶ Here, the Christian in the pews may find himself nodding in agreement. Many evangelicals think such erudite topics provide little to no real value for their life in the workplace or home.⁷

These postures of sharp rejection or cool indifference to aseity may be partly blamed on the sanitized version of the doctrine they have heard. Yet, as Christians wander in the desert of confusion and apathy, a burning bush speaks to them. God has revealed himself in his Word that Christians might know him truly and know him deeply. This paper argues that once a thoroughly

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 182-3.

³ In *Monologion*, Anselm discussed aseity at great length, and then proceeded to use it as framework for unpacking his entire doctrine of God (Anselm, “Monologion,” in *The Major Works*, Reissued, ed. Brian Davies and Gillian Evans, Oxford World’s Classics [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 5–81). Herman Bavinck began his discussion of the attributes with aseity (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 186), and Petrus van Mastricht championed it as the “highest and chief perfection of God . . . from it the rest of his perfections flow” (Petrus von Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester [Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019], 2:79).

⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Didsbury Lectures 2000; Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2001), 65-111; John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976) 41-62.

⁵ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 65-111; Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 41-62.

⁶ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, 2. ed (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 249.

⁷ Gavin Ortlund, “Trinity and Aseity,” in *On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God*, ed. Matthew Barrett, chap. 18 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024).

Christian understanding is restored to the doctrine of aseity, a wealth of practical, spiritual resources are uncovered for the ordinary life of Christians.

In order to support the paper's claim, the discussion proceeds in three movements. First, it fills out the definition for the doctrine of aseity and considers the critiques it elicits. Then, it examines a distinctively Christian description of aseity. Finally, it presents the wealth of everyday significance that follows from the doctrine.

Aseity Defined

Aseity as Independence

Aseity has often been used synonymously with the term Independence.⁸ Divine Independence asserts that God is utterly self-sufficient and self-existent. He does not depend on any creature for his existence and, as Bavinck contends, "God is independent in everything: in his existence, in his perfections, in his decrees, and in his works."⁹ This view of God's independence is recognized, generally, even in pagan religions, and it is known as the Absolute of philosophy.¹⁰ John Frame argues that all secular or religious schools of thought have searched for something *a se*.¹¹ Whether it is metaphysics searching for an ultimate cause of being, epistemology searching for an ultimate standard of truth, or ethics searching for an ultimate justification of right, they are all searching for something ultimate.¹² They need some final ground that can end the vicious spiral of infinite regression by relying on nothing greater for validation. This self-sufficient and self-existent God, the final ground, who depends on nothing

⁸ See, for example, Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 186.

⁹ This broad scope of God's Independence is precisely the reason he argues Reformed Theologians, like himself, came to prefer the term to Aseity, which he explained to be only regarding God's being (Bavinck, *Reformed dogmatics*, 187).

¹⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 58.

¹¹ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 411.

¹² Ibid.

and no one is precisely the God of the Bible. He is the God not “served by human hands, as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:25, ESV). This view of God’s Independence follows logically from a belief in monotheism and in creation ex nihilo.¹³ However, it is important to note that this articulation of aseity leans heavily on apophatic language to express merely what God is not: he is *not* dependent. He needs *nothing*. However, the very word Independence seems laden with the connotation of mere negation.¹⁴ More can and ought to be said about aseity.

Aseity as Plenitude

The discussion of this doctrine as Independence describes what John Webster referred to as the subordinate meaning of aseity.¹⁵ He asserts that the primary meaning is that God is *of himself*.¹⁶ Likewise, in multiple works, Webster stresses the importance of beginning our contemplation of God with who he is in himself, before considering him in his relations to creation.¹⁷ Theologia must precede oikonomia. For God was existing of himself from eternity before the beginning of his relation to creation.¹⁸ It is at this point in the discussion of aseity that richer vocabulary can be introduced. When considering who God is of himself positively, it is fitting to speak of God’s plenitude, fullness, and fecundity. Bavinck calls God, “a boundless

¹³ Ortlund, “Trinity and Aseity”, 259.

¹⁴ This is not to claim that theologians who prefer “Independence” to “Aseity” limit the discussion to negation. Berkhof and Bavinck prefer the term for its expansive scope, but both proceed to speak on more than negation (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 58; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 186–7). Instead, the claim is that the word Independence carries unhelpful connotations toward mere negation for those with a predisposition to disagree or be uninterested in the doctrine. Therefore, this paper will proceed with the term aseity.

¹⁵ John Webster, *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, vol. 1, *God and the Works of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 19.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John B. Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 1 (2009), 65; John B. Webster, “Trinity and Creation,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 1 (2010), 9–10; John B. Webster, “Life in and of Himself: Reflections on God’s Aseity,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 107–8.

¹⁸ Indeed, John Frame uses this thinking in his defence for preferring “Aseity” over “Independence”, explaining that Independence assumes creation. He disagrees with Bavinck’s claim that Aseity is limited to being, and instead asserts that aseity can be used for all God is and does (Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 405–6).

ocean of being.”¹⁹ Another rich image that theologians have used for millennia to speak of God’s life existing from himself is God as the “fountain of being.” John of Damascus beautifully employed the concept of aseity to establish God’s role as the source of all goodness:

Being Himself very light and goodness and life and essence, inasmuch as He does not derive His being from another, that is to say, of those things that exist: but being Himself the fountain of being to all that is, of life to the living, of reason to those that have reason; to all the cause of all good.²⁰

This language gets much closer to the grandeur of God’s aseity than mere affirmations of what God is not like or what he does not need. Or, in the imagery of the burning bush from Exodus 3, to speak of negation alone is to become fixated on the wood that is not consumed; to speak of the plenitude of God’s eternally self-existent life is to marvel at the roaring flame. The Westminster Divines demonstrate their grasp on the significance and fullness of this doctrine when they write,

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; He is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things...²¹

Here, the emphasis lies on the abundant fullness of what God is of himself, before attention is given to his relations. Having outlined the definition of the negative and positive meanings of aseity, the discussion must now turn to the critiques it has experienced in recent times.

Contemporary Critiques of Aseity

In the past century, theologians holding to Open Theism and Process Theology have

¹⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 186.

²⁰ John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, bk. 1, ch. 8, trans. E. W. Watson and L. Pullan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1899), revised and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3304.htm>

²¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, ch. 2, sec. 2, in Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader’s Edition* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 188.

raised challenges against the classical doctrines of God.²² Clark Pinnock claims that Classical Theists have “confused the God of biblical revelation with the god of the [Greek] philosophers”,²³ and he singles out self-sufficiency as a Greek addition.²⁴ John Sanders contended that the content of early Christian belief was much simpler than the tight logical system of Classical Theists, and he cited the Apostles’ Creed as evidence.²⁵ Instead, Open Theists argue for a God who is resourcefully engaged with his creation in a give-and-take relationship, guiding the world with creativity in his open project. His decisions and knowledge are dependent on the actions of his creation, but he is steering things artfully according to his wisdom.²⁶ In John Cobb and David Griffin’s key work on Process theology, they argue that aseity would demand complete providence because God’s knowledge could not be dependent on his creation, and so he must have total control to ordain things according to his knowledge.²⁷ However, in their view, this is a problem for aseity because they cannot find any grounds in scripture for absolute providence. So instead, they trace aseity back to Greek Philosophy.

Open Theists and Process Theologians both agree that tearing down false doctrines like aseity will lead to great gain for Christians. Pinnock powerfully conveys what he sees as the perversion they are removing from the doctrine of God: “The Hellenistic assumptions place God [as] far away from us and as high above us as possible. They lead us to a one-sidedly transcendent deity. The side of God that is turned away from us predominates, and the side of God that is turned toward us diminishes.”²⁸ In other words, if one accepts the God of Classical Theism, the God who exists of himself, they are consigned to a frozen and sanitized God who is

²² For a broader treatment of these doctrines, see Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

²³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 184.

²⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 66.

²⁵ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 95–6, 194.

²⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 85–96.

²⁷ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 52.

²⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 72.

turned away in self-involved transcendence. However, this is a gross misunderstanding of aseity. One small step toward correction has already begun in the description of aseity as plenitude more than mere negation, but this paper now moves to developing a thoroughly Christian view of aseity.

Christian Aseity

Covenantal Aseity

God's revelation of his proper name, YHWH, in Exodus 3 is a key text theologians have frequently cited in their writings on aseity.²⁹ When Moses asked how he could refer to God, God answered, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Douglas Kelly contends that this name clearly demonstrates God's self-sufficiency and aseity.³⁰ However, it is instructive to see the context wherein God is revealing his name as the self-existent, majestic and holy one: God is not speaking mere philosophical abstractions to teach Moses about his ontology. Rather, he is giving Moses his covenant name as he promises to be near him in the formidable task he is being sent out on.³¹ Through this name, God is assuring Moses that he is the same God who has always been with his fathers; he is the Faithful One who never forsakes His people.³² Later in Exodus, God recalls the name YHWH and unpacks its significance to Moses after the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt: "and he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy'" (Exodus 33:19). The name YHWH must be seen as expressing both God's absolute transcendence and his covenantal immanence. For, God's life is

²⁹ Bavink, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 176-7.

³⁰ Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1: The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2008), 280.

³¹ Martin Buber, *The Kingship of God* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967), 105, according to Kelly, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, 279.

³² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 183.

complete in and of himself and yet, he communicates himself in his ad extra works of creative and sustaining love.³³

This is far from the caricature of a frozen and aloof God that Open and Process Theologians accuse Classical Theists of presenting. Contrary to the depiction of these critics, theologians have historically seen that the God who exists of himself and needs nothing from creation, nevertheless, has entered into history, covenanting himself with his people. God's eternal self-existence is the sure ground from which he is able to work in the world of his creation, for his glory and his people's good.³⁴ Who God is in his relationship to creation cannot be considered aside from who God is of himself. Yet, God's revelation declares that his ontological transcendence does not hinder, but enables his covenantal immanence. While critics say that aseity diminishes the side of God turned toward us, our Covenant God reveals his aseity-charged name on the eve of his rescue mission to deliver his people from slavery.

Triune Aseity

God chose to become irrevocably Covenantal to His people, but he has eternally existed as Triune. Therefore, the Trinity must be acknowledged in a Christian's understanding of God's aseity.³⁵ As Webster powerfully explains, "Aseity is not merely the quality of being (in contrast to contingent reality) underived: it is the eternal lively plenitude of the Father who begets, the Son who is begotten, and the Spirit who proceeds from both."³⁶ If "God" is the only word in one's vocabulary for the subject of aseity, then one will be handicapped in their understanding of

³³ Webster, *God Without Measure*, 24.

³⁴ Brent A Rempel, "'A Field of Divine Activity': Divine Aseity and Holy Scripture in Dialogue with John Webster and Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 73, no. 3 (December 2020): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0036930620000320>

³⁵ Michael Allen, "Divine Attributes," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Scott R. Swain and Michael Allen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 66.

³⁶ Webster, *God Without Measure*, 20.

the depth of this doctrine. Aseity cannot be considered anterior to God's triune existence; for, aseity is God's "life from himself and therefore in himself.³⁷ Moreover, unless aseity is articulated in Triune terms, the doctrine fails to be uniquely Christian.³⁸ And a Triune aseity is precisely what the Church has been articulating throughout history.³⁹ The Father, Son, and Spirit share their life with one another, and "this is their common glory."⁴⁰ They each have life of themselves, even as the Son and Spirit are *a se* by their eternal and complete generation and procession from the Father.⁴¹ Thus, "aseity as such is defined by triune personal being".⁴²

Again, it is revealing to observe how far Triune aseity differs from the doctrine's caricature by Open Theists and Process Theologians. They contend that the Church Fathers smuggled Greek Philosophy into their theology by presenting God as an impersonal abstraction.⁴³ Yet, their analysis becomes misguided by fixating on their assumptions with words like aseity, immutability, and impassibility. They fail to see the context that the Church Fathers and their successors placed these doctrines into. Church Fathers like Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Hilary, and Augustine were led to amazement and devotion, as they meditated on the doctrine of aseity in relation to conceptions of God's Triune nature and supreme goodness.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is clearly significant to this discussion to see that the eternal fullness of life is held in common by the three persons of the Godhead as they indwell and relate to one another.

Incarnated Aseity

Finally, if one is seeking a *Christian* articulation of aseity, consideration of Christ is

³⁷ Webster, *God Without Measure*, 19.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kelly, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, 280–5.

⁴⁰ Allen, "Divine Attributes," 65.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 66.

⁴³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 68–74.

⁴⁴ Kelly, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, 281–2.

important. The triune God has lived eternally of and from himself before creation and the incarnation were realities; nevertheless, consideration of the incarnation brings greater depth and beauty to the doctrine. John Calvin reasoned that because deity exists *a se*, and the Son is God, then the Son exists *a se*.⁴⁵ In his commentaries, Calvin identified the Angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses and spoke to him from the burning bush as the preincarnate Son.⁴⁶ This would identify the ontological name “I AM WHO I AM” as coming from the mouth of the Son even in the Old Testament. Whether or not this is accepted, the Pharisees certainly believed Jesus claimed the divine name when they sought to stone him after he said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, *I am*” (John 8:58, emphasis added).⁴⁷ Jesus’s repeated “I am” statements in John confirms what T. F. Torrance calls, “the intensely personal nature of the ‘I am who I am’ of Yahweh.”⁴⁸ John’s Gospel contains a clear claim to Jesus’s aseity, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:26).⁴⁹ Moreover, John starts his Gospel by identifying Jesus with the divine Word of God, which begins a soteriological arc within the book: Jesus, who has life in himself, invites others into this life.⁵⁰ It is chiefly in the revelation of the incarnate Son that Christians learn that “what God is and has of himself is life, and that life includes a self-willed movement of love”⁵¹

Jesus’s aseity brings another strong blow to the argument raised from Open Theism and Process Theology traditions. Pinnock commends Karl Barth for “trailblazing a fresh trail in his

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, paperback edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 154.

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *Harmony of the Law: Commentary on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*, vol. 2, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), 60–62.

⁴⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 358.

⁴⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 119.

⁴⁹ Cf. Webster, *God Without Measure*, 24–7.

⁵⁰ Grant MacAskill, “Name Christology, Divine Aseity and the I Am Sayings in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12, no. 2 (2018): 240.

⁵¹ Webster, *God Without Measure*, 27.

treatment of the perfections of God.”⁵² He proceeds to praise the new move Barth makes by revisioning all God’s attributes through a Christocentric lens. Pinnock goes further to invite abandoning the “conventional theology” that has established a great “gulf” between how we conceive God and how he has revealed himself in Scripture through the person of Jesus.⁵³ In other words, Pinnock is celebrating Barth’s focus on Jesus because Pinnock sees this as a fatal blow to classical doctrines like aseity. However, Classical Theists have long given attention to God’s self-revelation, and the person of Jesus in particular. What they see when they do so is more confirmation of God’s aseity.

Aseity’s Practical Resources

Having established a thoroughly Christian articulation of aseity, the discussion now turns to examine the doctrine’s numerous practical implications. Sanders argued that the final criterion for evaluating a theological proposal is its “adequacy to meet the demands of life”⁵⁴ He contends that aseity fails this metric. Likewise, aseity is a non-starter for many evangelical Christians who become uninterested at the first hint of philosophical language. They might think that aseity is fine for academics, but not for Christian discipleship. However, with a robust understanding of aseity in place, a rich variety of spiritual resources become evident for Christians’ daily lives.

God’s Beauty in Aseity

To study the doctrine of aseity is to revel in the boundless beauty of God. Christians who do so find their hearts lifted up to their great Creator and Father. In other words, for Christians,

⁵² Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 73.

⁵³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 74.

⁵⁴ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 249; This is not to endorse the criteria as valid in every case, but simply to meet the critique on its own terms.

the goal of understanding aseity is not that one may become more refined and precise in their articulation of the doctrine; rather, the goal of grasping aseity is to behold him who eternally exists in fullness and plenitude of life from Himself. Christians do not study God as a biologist studies a deep sea creature; he is not some isolated and far off entity. He is their Creator, King, and Father, and they are his creatures, servants, and sons. They are intimately involved with this self-existent God because his is a covenantal aseity. Christians longingly repeat David's words: "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). "Gazing upon the beauty of the LORD" is no waste of time for the ordinary Christian, and beauty is precisely what the pious Christian sees in God when he considers aseity. When the Apostle Paul proclaims God's absolute independence, "For from him and through him and to him are all things.", he cannot restrain his tongue from continuing, "To him be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36).⁵⁵

While beholding the beauty of God needs no greater purpose than the mere delight it brings all who love him, it nevertheless proves infinitely valuable for the maturity of Christian faith. Humans were designed to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."⁵⁶ Thus, they are never more in line with their created design than when they look to him in awe and delight. Proper and fitting humility is restored to those who acknowledge and delight in the grandeur of their mighty God. It is with good reason the Proverbs instruct, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom . . ." (Proverbs 9:10). All proper knowledge and wise living must first be grounded in an orientation to the grandeur and goodness of God. As Gavin Ortlund put it:

⁵⁵ Cf. Bavink, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 177.

⁵⁶ *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Q. 1, in Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," in *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 411.

Divine aseity does not create a frozen, distant deity, slicing off meaningful contact between God and creatures; on the contrary, it grounds a proper conception of the Creator-creation distinction, directing us to stand before the triune God in abject humility, dependence, reverence, and worship.⁵⁷

In other words, aseity prompts the pious mind to look to its Covenantal God in worship, and worshipping the One who is utterly worthy is the deep need of every soul.

Aseity as Soul Shepherding

Deep and rich theology shepherds the soul through hardship. Critics of aseity claim that a dynamic God who changes with and because of His environment is better for Christians undergoing hardship.⁵⁸ Yet, this is not what Moses needed. When Moses was full of fear during his call, God assured him with his name, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Through this expression of God’s eternal and unchanging life, existing from himself, God was showing Moses that he is the unchangeable, Faithful One.⁵⁹ If aseity is granted, immutability is given as a natural consequence.⁶⁰ For, as Bavinck argues, “[t]o God alone belongs true being, and that which truly is remains”.⁶¹ In other words, if God has eternally been the fullness of existence and all perfections, there can be no lack in him to become anything he is not already.

So, in the divine name, Moses is reminded that “[God] is who he is, the same yesterday, today, and forever.”⁶² Christians need to see this clearly because if God is in fact pure and plentiful being, then he cannot change, and the same God at work in Jacob’s life and at work in Moses’s life is at work in the life of the 21st century believer. Throughout eternity God will be who he will be for his Covenant people. Aseity is one more promise for Christians to hold when

⁵⁷ Ortlund, “Trinity and Aseity”, 251.

⁵⁸ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 276.

⁵⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 182-3.

⁶⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 187.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 183.

it is hard to see and believe that God is still with them. They can take great confidence that their God is still able to work in the face of insurmountable trials because for eternity he has never depended on anything outside himself for power. He is the fullness of all power and might. They can take great confidence that their God is still moving toward them in love and mercy because he has never derived his capacity to love from another. Nothing can strip the vitality and fullness away from God's love to His Covenant people.

Further, it can often be incredibly difficult for Christians to trust what they know when faced with brokenness beyond their comprehension. Their soul is burdened by the evil and deep suffering around the world, and they grieve when tragedy strikes and they lose all that they love. They can be tempted to believe that God has changed, or that he is less good and beautiful than they hoped. Yet in the midst of hardship and heartache, Christians who have understood aseity can trust that their God is good, and in fact, the fullness of goodness. Even when they cannot understand it, they can place their trust on this sure foundation. Aseity implies that it is impossible for God to become less than the fullness of goodness, and nothing can diminish his love toward his people because it is not contingent on anything outside himself. In life's joys and sorrows, God is eternally the fullness and plenitude of life and goodness.

Aseity as Hope for Eternity and Ministry

The Triune and Incarnational dimensions to aseity provide great hope for Christians by shaping their thinking about eternity and ministry. Recognizing that aseity is an attribute shared by the three persons of the Godhead, as they mutually indwell and relate to one another, provides a beautiful image for eschatological hope in the Christian life. The Bible's claim is that the relationship the Son has with the Father by nature is given to Christians by grace (John 20:17).

Jesus himself prayed to the Father, confident of this reality: “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one...” (John 17:22–23a). Thus, eternity will be for Christians a participation in the life of their Triune God who is the fount of all goodness and life. In this way, God’s aseity functions as another means to fill the Christian pilgrim’s heart with eagerness and excitement as they await their eternal home. Christians are able to live bold lives of sacrificial abandon for Jesus and His Church once their affections are drawn to something greater than this world.

Moreover, appreciating the reality that the Incarnate Lord Jesus shares the Divine attribute of aseity emboldens Christians in the work of ministry. After the Apostle John teaches that the Father “has granted the Son also to have life in himself”, he continues, “And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life...” (John 5:26b-29a). Here, we see John expressing something remarkable: the Son having life in himself is the grounds for him giving life to others. This pattern of the Son having the authority to give life extends also to spiritual life (John 6:36). Like the sign of the Spirit giving life to a valley of dry bones, the Son, by the Spirit, can give spiritual life to all who are dead in their sins. He depends on nothing and no one to grant life to whom he wills. Therefore, Christians in ministry are freed from the paralyzing angst of thinking success will rise and fall on their own efforts.⁶³ Rather, God delights to send out weak vessels who proclaim him to a lost and dying world. Equipped with the knowledge of His aseity, “we [will] not lose heart [in ministry]” because of the confidence that the same God who spoke and brought light out of darkness will shine in the hearts of others “to give the light of the knowledge

⁶³ Ronni Kurtz, “Divine Aseity and Your Day-to-Day,” *Midwestern Magazine*, no. 40 (2020): 28–30.

of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Conclusion

This study has argued that once a full and distinctively Christian articulation of aseity is established, the doctrine provides a wide array of spiritual resources for the ordinary life of Christians. Aseity includes God’s absolute independence from all things, but goes further to speak of the fullness of his being and character. Critics have asserted that aseity describes a Stoic God who is impossibly distant from his creation.⁶⁴ Yet, this paper has demonstrated that a recognition of the Covenantal, Triune, and Incarnated dimensions of God’s self-existence reveal a God whose life is both utterly perfect *in himself*, and also, powerfully moving out *from himself* in love. As the Christian’s mind is equipped with this understanding, his heart is compelled toward God in delight and dependence. In an unpredictable world, aseity presents a God who can be trusted: he is the fullness of all “wisdom and goodness, righteousness and holiness, power and blessedness.”⁶⁵ Likewise, it presents God as a sure anchor of hope. In a pilgrim existence, Christians have the eschatological hope of being with him who is the fullness of life. In weary ministry, Christians can rely on the power of him, who is life, to create life in dead hearts. Further work will be needed to consider *how* the richness of the doctrine can be best taught to Christians. However, this study has demonstrated that whatever difficulties there may be, the benefits for Christian maturity will be profound.

⁶⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 65-111.

⁶⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 177.

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