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AN ASSESSMENT OF SOME RECENT TRINITARIAN THOUGHT

Submitted to the University of Durham
for the degree of Master of Arts (by thesis)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of some representative thinkers in recent trinitarian thinking (post 1970). My intention is to note leading themes, in particular changes from past emphases, and also assess the seriousness of some of the problems that result.

In the first two chapters I characterise and analyse in some detail two representative Roman Catholic writers (Leonardo Boff and Catherine Mowry LaCugna) and two Protestant (Jürgen Moltmann and Colin E. Gunton), noting some of their major recurring themes, and, where appropriate, points of convergence or divergence.

Chapter III then focuses upon the most marked feature of recent trinitarian thinking, the new stress on a dynamic and social understanding of the doctrine.

Chapter IV offers a critique, arguing that the whole approach is premised on anthropological and sociological assumptions that really come from elsewhere than from revelation. The net result is to restrain God in a typology of this world.

The final chapter then attempts to balance that critique by noting both positive and negative contributions in such recent thinking.

As a whole the thesis welcomes the new focus on the biblical revelation, as I agree that the doctrine can only be found on the basis of God's salvation history. Where I differ is in questioning whether recent trends do not impair the fundamentally transcendent character of the being of God, through too simplistic a dependency on human reason and anthropological ideologies.

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CONTENTS

Abstract	i	
Acknowledgements	ii	
Contents	iii	
Introduction	1	
Chapter I	An exposition of recent trinitarian thought: Moltmann, Boff, LaCugna, and Gunton as examples	3
Chapter II	A critical assessment of the four theologians	51
Chapter III	An analysis of the main changes and direction in recent trinitarian thought	89
Chapter IV	The fundamental issue: The disanalogy between God and our world	115
Chapter V	Conclusion	166
Bibliography	183	

INTRODUCTION

Trinitarian theology in the recent years appears to be opening up a new era. There is a re-vitalisation in trinitarian thought and rise of new interests;¹ this new phenomenon is marked by distinctive changes of thought in the Trinity which stand in isolation from the trinitarian theology of the past. What is of special interest is that several trends of recent trinitarian conception receive wide agreement from many scholars of different denominational backgrounds. This suggests that the changes are not accidental.

It is the main interest of this thesis to identify what those changes are. It is important to discern which direction our contemporary trinitarian thought is moving. Such changes should, however, not simply be accepted but need to be evaluated against an historical background.

Given the limited space, inevitably, this thesis cannot be fully comprehensive. To deal with every aspect of the theology of the Trinity or even to analyse every recent trinitarian thinker would be impossible. I will confine myself to four writers, J. Moltmann, L. Boff, L. M. LaCugna, and C. E. Gunton, who I believe are among the more influential trinitarian theologians of our time. The four theologians I have chosen

¹Cf. C.Schöbel, 'The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks', in C.Schöbel, (ed.) Trinitarian Theology Today, p.1. J.Thomson, Modern Trinitarian Perspectives, p.3. R.Feenstra and C.Plantinga, Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement, p.3.

Full bibliographical details are in each case provided at the end of the thesis.



between them represent contemporary trinitarian theology, and I shall attempt to identify what is common in their work and so show some general tendencies of recent trinitarian thought.

Chapters I to III will comprise a study of the four theologians in which I will highlight their thought to derive some conclusions on what the general trends in recent trinitarian theology are. These chapters mainly aim to understand objectively how the Trinity is conceived today rather than to criticise why it is conceived in this way. In Chapter IV, based on this analysis, I will then raise and discuss a number of issues where I find the development problematic. In Chapter V, the last chapter, I will attempt to articulate the pros and cons of current trinitarian thought and also suggest some modifications where necessary.

CHAPTER I

An exposition of recent trinitarian thought:

Moltmann, Boff, LaCugna, and Gunton as examples

The last three decades have witnessed a remarkable surge of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity among theologians. Many theologians have devoted themselves to a determined presentation of their thought through books and essays, while others also have observed this new movement positively and share many of its views. Among the more active and conspicuous theologians are J.Moltmann, L.Boff, L.M.LaCugna, and C.E.Gunton, and they are the writers whose trinitarian thought I shall assess. The publication of their books are roughly spread out evenly to cover the last three decades. Moreover, they are equally divided into two parties representing the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches. I have not included anyone from the Orthodox church, because, although its theological influence in recent years has been considerable,² it is the change of thought in the West with which I am mainly concerned in this thesis.

²Especially influential in current trinitarian theology is the study of John D. Zizioulas, who in his Being as Communion has dealt with the concept of personhood and throws light on the concept of personhood in the trinitarian God.

Moltmann

Moltmann is probably one of the most influential trinitarian theologians since the 1970s. One central feature of Moltmann's theology of the Trinity is the emphasis he gives to sociality in the nature of the being of God. Moltmann stresses that the biblical references to God's being and acts always take a trinitarian form. On this basis Moltmann rigidly rejects monotheistic understanding of God. With this social concept of trinitarian insight he further draws a vision of the Kingdom of God, in which all creation joins in the communion of the Triune God.

Moltmann argues that the philosophical and theological traditions which have conceived God on the basis of a 'subject' metaphysics are increasingly losing their position and are being replaced by a social interpretation of the Triune God.³ Moltmann says that this 'subject' conceptuality has been preserved in the form of the ideas of God as 'Supreme Substance' and as 'Absolute Subject'. The concept of Supreme Substance, originating in ancient Greek cosmologies, had been expressed by Aquinas and Thomas and was prevalent in the Middle Ages; while the idea of Absolute Subject, particularly noticeable in modern 'European subjectivity', was developed in the thoughts of Descartes, Kant, and Schleiermacher. Moltmann sees that in recent years such an anthropological conceptuality is being replaced by relational theories about the world, which tend to change self-focussed behaviour into social patterns. In this new trend of human conceptuality, 'subjective' theories are no longer convincing. All 'subjective' understanding of God is, as the history of the doctrine of the Trinity witnesses, likely to

³J.Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, pp.10-15.

lead to a monotheistic view of the Trinity. Moltmann implies therefore that interpreting the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in social and relative terms is a natural and inevitable new task of contemporary theology.

Moltmann's foremost concern, in developing and evaluating a trinitarian doctrine, is whether the original hermeneutical decision taken to produce it is sound. Any dogmatic work on the Trinity must be checked against the general tenor of the biblical message. Nevertheless, depending on the hermeneutic that is taken, the consequent interpretation can greatly vary.⁴ The same biblical accounts can end up with, for example, a moral interpretation of the gospel (liberal Protestant) or the Barthian statement that 'God reveals himself as Lord'; both of these conclusions are the result of a monotheistic conception, stemming from a supposition that history is the work of a single, absolute subject, and thus they are inconsistent with the biblical accounts.⁵ Moltmann argues that the witness of the New Testament depicts Jesus as 'the Son', who has a unique reciprocal relationship with the Father and the Spirit: the Son is never consummated by a single subject. Thus Moltmann's starting point for establishing a trinitarian doctrine is the presupposition that "the New Testament talks about God by proclaiming in narrative the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, which are relationships of fellowship and are open to the world."⁶

Then, what does Moltmann actually say about the trinitarian witness of the New

⁴Ibid., pp.61-65.

⁵Ibid., p.64.

⁶Ibid..

Testament? He investigates the biblical accounts and concludes that where there is Jesus there is always a perceptible trinitarian form.⁷ Whether it be the sending of the Son, Jesus' baptism, call, and ministry, the Passion, the Resurrection, the sending of the Spirit, or the eschatological association of the Son, there is always a triadic formulation of the co-working and relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. In the sending of the Son, for example,

The Father sends the Son through the Spirit.

The Son comes from the Father in the power of the Spirit.

The Spirit brings people into the fellowship of the Son with the Father.⁸

From his analysis of the New Testament accounts, Moltmann draws a number of dogmatic principles.⁹ Among them are, firstly, "the rule of Christ . . . displays a trinitarian structure in both history and eschatology, for it springs from the co-working of the three divine subjects: Father, Son and creative Spirit." Secondly, "Father, Son and Spirit do not combine or work together according to a single pattern." In Moltmann's analysis we find three different patterns of trinitarian sequence:

Father – Spirit – Son (in the sending, lifting up and resurrection of Christ)

Father – Son – Spirit (in the lordship of Christ and the sending of the Spirit)

Spirit – Son – Father (eschatological consummation and glorification)

Thirdly, "the trinitarian history of the kingdom of God is an eschatologically open

⁷Ibid., pp.65-94.

⁸Ibid., p.75.

⁹Ibid., pp.94-96.

history now". Fourthly, despite the fact that there are three distinctive persons in the scene, they are united as one, not numerically; but in the 'fellowship' (eg., John. 10.30), which is an 'open' fellowship that invites believers into itself (eg., John 17.21).

The unity of the divine beings, implied by this 'fellowship', has been Moltmann's central theme. According to the New Testament testimony, Moltmann says, the unity of the three Persons is an "open", "inviting" and "communicable" unity.¹⁰ Neither "the *homogeneity* of the divine substance" nor "the *sameness* and the identity of the absolute subject" allows God to be communicable or open – they are exclusive and not inclusive – and therefore are not compatible to the biblical testimony of how the triune God unites others with himself. Moltmann terms the open and communicable character of the divine unity as "the unitedness" or preferably "the at-oneness",¹¹ which, he maintains, presuppose the self-differentiation of the persons of God and resist a modal differentiation.

Moltmann claims that the history of salvation is the history of the triune God himself.¹² This means that "the triune God can only appear in history as he is in himself."¹³ In other words, the immanent Trinity must correspond to the economic Trinity. This view is obviously compatible with the positions of Barth and Rahner. Nonetheless, both Barth's and Rahner's positions, like that of Augustine in his

¹⁰Ibid., p.149.

¹¹Ibid., p.150. It may be necessary to remember that these are English translation from German.

¹²Ibid., pp.154-157.

¹³Ibid., p.153. Cf. p.157.

psychological doctrine, are erroneous, since they started their theology from a single subject, rather than from a communion of three distinctive divine person. Their doctrinal formulation was based on the biblical dictum that man is made in God's image. It, however, did not recognise that man is God's image only in fellowship with others (Cf., Genesis 1:7b, "male and female he created them"). What is considered by the words, the image of God, is not some sort of completed individual personality but it is the communion of believers.¹⁴ Moltmann then emphasises,¹⁵

The history of God's trinitarian relationships of fellowship corresponds to the eternal perichoresis of the Trinity. For this trinitarian history is nothing other than the eternal perichoresis of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their dispensation of salvation, which is to say in their opening of themselves for the reception and unification of the whole creation.¹⁵

Moltmann, therefore, concludes that the at-oneness of the triune God "corresponds" to the experience of the Christian community.¹⁶

This naturally brings us to the question of the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Moltmann initially takes up Rahner's thesis that the immanent Trinity is identical with the economic Trinity,¹⁷ but insists that the latter determines the former. Our knowledge of the Trinity relies on the saving act of Jesus Christ, therefore

¹⁴Ibid., p.156.

¹⁵Ibid., p.157.

¹⁶Ibid., pp.157f.

¹⁷Ibid., pp.158-161.

it is not possible to suppose that the immanent Trinity is not affected by the event of the cross. On the contrary, God suffers the pain of the cross, and the pain “determines the inner life of the Triune God from eternity to eternity”.¹⁸ The identification between the immanent and the economic Trinity does not mean the dissolution of the one in the other; it means “the interaction between the substance and the revelation, the ‘inwardness’ and the ‘outwardness’ of the triune God”.¹⁹ The doctrinal thesis here is, therefore, that “the economic Trinity not only reveals the immanent Trinity; it also has a retroactive effect on it”.

One conspicuous issue Moltmann raises concerns the Filioque. Moltmann suggests that the problem of the Filioque must be solved by removing the Filioque clause from the Western creed.²⁰ The Filioque was a later addition to the original Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, and the addition purported merely to clarify, and not to correct, the trinitarian statement. Moreover, the removal would not alter the actual constitutional relations between the Persons of the Trinity. The fact that the creed is silent about the relationship between the Son and the Spirit cannot be understood as an official decision against the involvement of the Son in the procession of the Spirit from the Father.

In addition to the removal of the Filioque from the creed, Moltmann suggests an adverb ‘solely’ to be inserted in the statement: ‘the Holy Spirit “solely” proceeds from

¹⁸Ibid., p.161.

¹⁹Ibid., p.160.

²⁰Ibid., pp.180-182.

the Father'.²¹ The 'solely' designates the unique mode of the Spirit's procession from the Father, and at the same time prevents confusions about the inner relationship of the Trinity. There is not two causes (or origins) in the procession of the Spirit – as if the Father and the Son are competing concerning the issue of the Spirit – but the Father is the sole cause.

What, then, can we say about the constitutional relationship between the Son and the Spirit? As an answer, Moltmann highlights a unique relationship between the Son and the Spirit: "the Spirit proceeds from *the Father of the Son*".²² The Father is the Father of the Son – not of the Spirit. Thus, the procession of the Spirit from the Father premises the begetting of the Son through the Father, for it is only in this that the Father manifests himself as the Father and is the Father. The Father who breathes out the Spirit does so as the Father of the Son. In this case, the Son is the logical condition for the Father's breathing out of the Spirit, though the Father is still the sole origin of the divine existence of the Spirit. In this view, the procession of the Spirit is distinguished from the begetting of the Son but they are nonetheless related. The procession of the Spirit and the generation of the Son from the Father are simultaneous, yet, however paradoxical it may sound, the procession of the Spirit is done in the eternal presence of the Son. In this sense, we could say that the Son is not uninvolved in the procession of the Spirit. In all this consideration, therefore, Moltmann suggests that the statement of the creed

²¹Ibid., pp.182ff.

²²Ibid., pp.183f.

should be read as "The Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father of the Son".²³

Moltmann, however, claims that the 'and from the Son' ('Filioque') has a ground for its justification.²⁴ While the Spirit receives his divine existence (*hypostasis, hyparxis*) from the Father, he receives his "relational form" or "perichoretic form" (*eidos, prosopon*) from the Son. Consequently, the Spirit's complete form is given by the Father 'and by the Son'. It follows, then, that the corrected credal text should be interpreted by saying: "The Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father of the Son, and who receives his form from the Father and the Son".²⁵

One of the most emphasised themes in Moltmann's trinitarian theology is the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, as the title of his book suggests: The Trinity and the Kingdom of God. Moltmann's general charge against monotheism (of any sorts) is once again accentuated here in his discussion of the kingdom of God. The essential premise of the kingdom of God, he believes, is freedom. That is why he also terms the kingdom of God as 'the kingdom of freedom', as suggested by one of the chapter titles. He believes freedom is irreconcilable with monotheistic beliefs; freedom is guaranteed only in perichoretic trinitarian understanding of God and human society. Moltmann holds that monotheism leads to monarchism,²⁶ and monarchism legitimates domination by the almighty ruler, on the one hand, and dependency, helplessness and servitude, on the

²³Ibid., p.184.

²⁴Ibid., pp.185-187.

²⁵Ibid., p.187.

²⁶Ibid., pp.191-202.

other, as history has witnessed. The doctrine of the Trinity must develop the doctrine of freedom in order to resist monarchism and the consequent supremacy and subjugation.

Moltmann argues that the doctrine of the Trinity must overcome political monotheism. Religious monotheism develops into political monotheism and, further, into absolutism. Political monotheism can be overcome when God is conceived in trinitarian terms and not as “monadically” or “subjectivistically”.²⁷ He argues that in trinitarian understandings, it is impossible to deduce from the doctrine of God any image of the absolutistic monarch as often assumed as such by earthly rulers.²⁸ The Father gave his Son to die; the Son, in love, was crucified for the oppressed; while the Spirit gathers up men and women into fellowship with God. Moreover, it is not the monarchic rulers, but the Christian community – for whom there is no superiority or subjugation – that reflects the Triune God. It is the divine sharing of everything in common except individual characteristics that determines the nature of the community. Another important reflection from the nature of the Triune God is that it is not the individuality – outlined in Augustine’s psychological doctrine of the Trinity – but the sociality – maintained by the Cappadocian Fathers – that corresponds to the Triune God. Nevertheless, Moltmann points out that the doctrine of the Trinity harmonises ‘personality’ and ‘sociality’. They are not antithetic but supplementary. Therefore, what is suggested in the doctrine of the Trinity is either ‘social personalism’ or ‘personal

²⁷Ibid., pp.192-200. The quoted words appear on p.197.

²⁸Ibid., pp.197f.

socialism'.²⁹

The doctrine of the Trinity must also overcome 'clerical monotheism', Moltmann argues.³⁰ Clerical monotheism derives its origin from the principle formulated by Ignatius of Antioch, namely, one God – one Christ – one bishop – one church, and this principle has been developed into the church's doctrine of clerical authority, which still exists today. The principle may have contributed to the unity of the churches, but it also has had some adverse effects. The event of Jesus and Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16.13-20) does not give sufficient theological support for the role of the pope.³¹ Rather, the justification for the church's unity must be grounded on John 17.20f. ("That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee . . . they may be one even as we are one . . .", RSV.). The unity depicted here is 'trinitarian', not hierarchal. A trinitarian church is a community free of dominion: it is a community of concord and harmony.

Having removed the historical presuppositions of political and clerical monotheism from consideration, Moltmann sets out to establish a new doctrine of the Kingdom of God. He regards highly the doctrine of the Kingdom of God of Joachim of Fiore (1132-1202) as a model to follow.³² Joachim had presented the Kingdom of God as a sequence of three divided historical periods of divine rule: the kingdom of the

²⁹Ibid., p.199.

³⁰Ibid., pp.200-202.

³¹Ibid., p.200.

³²Ibid., pp.203-209.

Father, the kingdom of the Son, and the kingdom of the Spirit. Each of these 'kingdoms' takes its unique form in chronological history, corresponding to the unique characteristic of each of the three divine Persons, who take turns in sovereignty. According to Joachim the kingdom of the Father is concerned with the creation and preservation of the world; the kingdom of the Son involves the redemption of the world by the Son; and the kingdom of the Spirit is the period of the rebirth of Christian believers by the work of the Spirit.

Moltmann, however, finds Joachim's doctrine of the kingdom of God to be modalistic,³³ as what is envisaged is merely "qualitative transitions", rather than chronological divisions or any continuous developments through the changes of eras. Joachim's eras of the kingdoms of the Father, the Son and the Spirit are to be consummated and completed in an assumed fourth kingdom in which the Triune God is jointly sovereign: the triune kingdom of glory. In other words, in the three kingdoms each of the divine Persons rules exclusively of the other two Persons.

Moltmann points out that an equivalent doctrine to Joachim's trinitarian history of the kingdom is found in the orthodox Protestant tradition (Lutheran and Calvinist), in which the divisions are the kingdoms of nature, grace and glory (*regnum naturae*, *regnum gratiae* and *regnum gloriae*).³⁴ Although this doctrine has a threefold form, if the third kingdom, kingdom of glory, is excluded as an eschatological era as in Joachim's case, there are only two kingdoms left to consider. Moltmann argues that the

³³Ibid., p.207.

³⁴Ibid., p.206.

kingdoms of nature and grace are fundamentally irreconcilable to each other, just as much as the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom were understood in the history of European thought as antonyms.³⁵

Neither the modalistic kingdoms outlined by Joachim nor the dualistic kingdoms of the Protestant doctrine would be truly a trinitarian kingdom of God. In opposition to these two types of kingdom of God, Moltmann builds up a doctrine of the 'triunitary' kingdom of God.³⁶ In this doctrine, each of the kingdoms of the Father, the Son and the Spirit manifests the distinctive nature of the corresponding divine Person, but the transitions do not make the presence of the preceding Person(s) to cease: their presence continues in the successive era(s): "Just as the kingdom of the Son presupposes and absorbs the kingdom of the Father, so the kingdom of the Spirit presupposes the kingdom of the Son and absorbs that."³⁷

"The kingdom of the Father consists of the creation of a world open to the future, and the preservation both of existence itself and of its openness for the future of the kingdom of glory."³⁸ Basically, the significance of the kingdom of God lies in the creation, the ultimate aim of which is the glorification of the triune God. Here, Moltmann's concept of the historical kingdom of God is developed beyond Joachim's by adding a futuristic dimension. "The kingdom of the Son consists of the liberating

³⁵Ibid., p.208.

³⁶Ibid., pp.209-212.

³⁷Ibid., p.209.

³⁸Ibid.. Also see pp.105-114.

lordship of the crucified one, and fellowship with the first-born of many brothers and sisters."³⁹ The role of the Son's rule is the liberation of people to become the children of God. The kingdom of the Son presupposes the kingdom of the Father. In this kingdom the Son awaits the kingdom of the Spirit, and his kingdom looks forward to the eschatological kingdom of glory. "The kingdom of the Spirit is experienced in the gift conferred on the people liberated by the Son – the gift of the Holy Spirit's energies."⁴⁰ In the Spirit's kingdom, the liberated people are led into the community free of privileges and subjugation. While the kingdom of the Spirit presupposes the kingdoms of the Father and the Son, it also anticipates, and is led towards, the eschatological kingdom of glory. "Finally, the kingdom of glory must be understood as the consummation of the Father's creation, as the universal establishment of the Son's liberation, and as the fulfilment of the Spirit's indwelling."⁴¹ Thus Moltmann's doctrine of the kingdom of God expresses God as triune God, manifesting himself in history, whose rule aims at creation, liberation and glorification in a historical sequence, at the end of which glorification is eternally fulfilled.

Moltmann declares that the history of the kingdom of God is essentially the history of progressive freedom. On his framework of the trinitarian kingdom of God, Moltmann further develops this doctrine of freedom.⁴² The general concept of freedom

³⁹Ibid., p.210.

⁴⁰Ibid., p.211.

⁴¹Ibid., p.212.

⁴²Ibid., pp.213-222.

in European thought is discussed in terms of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom, to which 'the moral striving for the Good' may be added as a third category.⁴³ In sociological terms, this can be interpreted in the categories of lordship (relationship between 'subject and object'), community (the relationship between 'subject and subject'), and hope for the future (the relationship between 'subject and projects').⁴⁴ In its theological dimension, on the other hand, freedom must be conceived in terms of the freedom of God's servant, the freedom God's children, and the freedom of God's friend'.⁴⁵ It is because:

The trinitarian doctrine of the kingdom is the theological doctrine of freedom. The theological concept of freedom is the concept of the trinitarian history of God: God unceasingly desires the freedom of his creation. God is the inexhaustible freedom of those he has created.⁴⁶

Here freedom is understood qualitatively (and not quantitatively), and "as a process of maturing through experiences that are continually new."⁴⁷

To sum up, Moltmann maintains that God is to be conceived in no other way than in what is revealed in the historical missions of the Son and the Spirit, sent by the Father. The biblical testimony tells us that God is intrinsically in the triadic unity of

⁴³Ibid., pp.213f.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp.214-216.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp.219-222.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.218.

⁴⁷Ibid., p.212.

Father, Son and Spirit. Therefore, God must not be understood as monotheistic sovereign, but be spoken of on the basis of a social relationship of the three Persons. The reciprocal communion of the Trinity is not a closed relationship; the Trinity's fellowship is outward and thus open to the world, and futuristic. Such an outwardness and futuristic nature of God's fellowship determines the regime of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of freedom. The kingdom consists of three eras, corresponding historical transitions of the quality of freedom given, and maturing stages of faith of, the believer and the believing community. The Father, the Son and the Spirit takes turns in sovereignty according to the kingdom which bears each of their names, but this does not mean that one rules his kingdom in total absence of the other two. On the contrary, in each kingdoms, the other two Persons participates in the Person who is in charge. Ultimately, this reciprocal relationship of the Trinity is fully manifested in the eschatological kingdom of glory in which 'the triune God' is the ruler.

Boff

While Moltmann adopts a dogmatic approach, Boff, on the other hand, focusses more on sociological reflections. Although Boff deals with an extensive range of theological issues, his views and arguments remarkably converge into one theme: the sociological inspiration of the being of the Trinity that throws lights on concrete human social life today.

Boff's trinitarian theology starts from the thesis that God is not a solitary One but

the communion of Three.⁴⁸ If God were one, then there would be solitude. If God were two, there would be separation. Only if God were three would solitude and separation and exclusion be overcome. The third figure provides thus openness and communion. If God is Trinity then the nature of this God is fundamentally found in inclusiveness and openness. This means that our conception of the triune God must include within it not only the divine differences but also other differences as well, that is, those outside the divine realm.

Boff says that God is the perichoretic union of the three unique eternal divine persons – the Father, the Son and the Spirit.⁴⁹ Boff argues that both the Greek and the Latin approaches can mislead. The Greek views of the Father as the source and origin of all divinity not only implies a “consubstantial and so one sole God” but can easily be developed into a ‘theogony’ or subordinationism. The Latin concept of God does not avoid a tendency towards theogony either, since it also speaks of the single causality of God. It, moreover, runs the risk of modalism. Boff therefore suggests a third option: the theological approach starting from the three Persons as revealed in the scriptures. “They co-exist simultaneously and the Three are co-eternal from the beginning.”⁵⁰ The three are united by the perichoretic communion they share between them, and they live in communion. The divine union is not a consequence of communion as if each of the Three had been previously existing in separation from another. On the contrary, they

⁴⁸L.Boff, *Trinity and Society*, pp.2f.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp.4-7.

⁵⁰Ibid., p.4.

have co-existed in communion always and from all eternity. Boff says that this third view risks tritheism, but overcomes it by the concepts of perichoresis and the eternal existence of the three Persons.

It is worth mentioning here that the two concepts above – the openness and inclusiveness of the Trinity, and the perichoretic communion of the Trinity – are the key principles in Boff's social trinitarian theology. It is these from which Boff endeavours to find justification for his liberation theology.

Boff says that the communion of the Trinity had already been "in the beginning" – before God was finally revealed as Trinity by the historical Jesus and the Spirit – so there has never been a solitary, single, God: there has always been the communion of three divine Persons.⁵¹ It is this, the perichoresis of the trinitarian communion, which offers us a model for the formation of egalitarian society. Boff stresses that in Latin America and most of the Third World there is less communion, little social justice, and thus much oppression and suffering of the poor by the ruling class, while the role of the church has been ineffective in reversing this situation or even misused it. Boff maintains that such a social condition is due to the distortion of Christian faith in God. He says, "a disunited society affects our understanding of faith".⁵² For example, the paternalism (of the family relationship) encourages in the wide society a patriarchal and patrimonialist image of God the Father. There are also a socialist 'leader' image in the figure of Christ, and the charismatic sects and the so-called new religious movements place too much

⁵¹Ibid., p.10f.

⁵²Ibid., p.13.

emphasis on the interiority of the Spirit. All this results when God is understood other than the Trinity in communion. In trinitarian faith, we can say that “the Trinity is our true social programme.”⁵³ Monotheism is a major obstruction to the concept of “Trinity-communion” because it has been developed and integrated in the socio-political and the religious orders through a long history.⁵⁴ Whether it be a “pre-trinitarian” type⁵⁵ or “a-trinitarian” type⁵⁶, monotheism brings about destructive results. In the former type, belief in God can easily become atheistic especially in modern environments.⁵⁷ In the latter type, it does justice to authoritarian, totalitarian ideologies of one person or ruling class in politics as well as in religion. Only in the faith in God as the Father, Son and the Spirit in the perichoretic communion, the monotheistic understanding of God and its adverse-consequences can be overcome.

Boff maintains that the changing cultural situation in recent years requires a new interpretation of trinitarian concepts.

There is . . . the suspicion (in the absence of sufficient evidence to the contrary) that the conceptual and terminological complications surrounding the Trinity owe less to the mystery itself than to our cultural

⁵³Ibid., p.16.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp.16-24.

⁵⁵According to Boff, “pre-trinitarian” monotheism has been preserved and developed in ancient religions, Judaism, the Greek philosophy (of the Supreme Being), and in modern thought (Kant). Ibid., pp.16-20.

⁵⁶Boff’s “a-trinitarian” monotheism is, it appears to me, understood in contrast to the faith in the Trinity in eternal communion as three distinctive Persons.

⁵⁷Boff, *Trinity and Society*, p.19.

heritage and to an approach that has paid more attention to clarity of concepts and forms than to finding a meaning for our lives . . . Our age . . . is marked by a crisis of reason . . . the classic doctrine of the Trinity – which supposes confidence in reason and enthusiasm for its performance – has . . . lost much of its power of persuasion.⁵⁸

Therefore, faith has to be built on our experience of God: theology has to be based on experience. We cannot ignore our modern culture – including the sciences of humanity, society, and history. One notable contribution of the modern culture to theology is to be found in the change in the concept of ‘person’ – from a psychological to a relational notion – which as a matter of course demands a re-interpretation of the Trinity. A renewed trinitarian thought is now seeking to interpret God and the world not as two opposed realities but as intrinsically connected: the general trend is to see the relational nature of the life of the Trinity as inspiring the patterns of our social life. Coupled with that social development, there is another new trend to be noted, namely, the ‘trans-sexist theology of the Maternal Father and the Paternal Mother’.⁵⁹ In this way, Boff places emphasis on a new but inevitable task for modern theology. Complying with this modern demand, Boff draws out his views on the Trinity as follows:

“[T]he supreme goal of human life is represented as sharing in divine life”.⁶⁰ God

⁵⁸Ibid., pp.111-113.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp.120-122.

⁶⁰Ibid., p.124.

is the eternally living One.⁶¹ Life is “a state or result of a process of self-realization”.⁶² God is thus in eternal process of ‘self-realization’. “The process of self-realization of the Trinity is made up of a dynamic of eternal communion, sharing the life of one with the others, the interpenetration and co-inherence of the Three.”⁶³ God is always the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in communion, in totally reciprocal loving relationship – the perichoresis.⁶⁴ Not only is this communion of the Trinity the root of human unity, it moreover invites the latter into the union of the former.

Boff emphasises the eternal perichoretic relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. He accepts the church’s use of the terms ‘begetting’ and ‘breathing-out’, but he does so reluctantly because of their inherent suggestions of a “theogony”, an “intra-divine production”, or a “causal dependence”.⁶⁵ “Each one of the Persons is ‘without beginning’ and is therefore revealed simultaneously and at the outset, each breaking out, as it were, in the direction of the others”. None of them is anterior to the others, because they have their origin from all eternity. If so, what have the terms ‘begetting’ and ‘proceeding’ got to do with God the Trinity? Boff’s answer is that they are terminology for “intra-trinitarian and interpersonal revelation,”⁶⁶ rather than for causal or generic dependency. Each of the Persons is the condition for the revelation of

⁶¹Cf., Gen.2:7; Exod.3:13-15; Ps.18:46, 36:9, 104:30; Isa.42:5; John 11:25, 14:6,5:26.

⁶²Boff, *Trinity and Society*, p.127.

⁶³Ibid., p.128.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp.134-145.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp.145f.

⁶⁶Ibid., p.146.

the other Two. The eternal co-existence of the “Three Uniques in perichoresis” is the one single God and the primary divine reality. Accordingly, there cannot be either any subordinationist, hierarchical, theogonic, or modalistic ideas or tritheistic idea, derived from the way what God is.⁶⁷

Because of this unique relational being of the Trinity, everything in, and about, God is always triadic.⁶⁸ Thus one should say, for example, that

the Father reveals himself through the Son and the Spirit.... the Father reveals the Son with the participation of the Spirit.... the Son is ‘begotten’ by the Father in the Holy Spirit.... the Son reveals the Father in the light of the Holy Spirit.... the Son is also revealed to the Holy Spirit as co-related to the Father, since the Father will be eternally the Father of the Son.⁶⁹

Given that all this can be said of God, Boff thinks, ‘why not the Filioque?’. “The Spirit”, Boff says, “‘proceeds’ from the Father and rests on the Son, being thus *ex Patre Filioque*.”⁷⁰

Such a continuous circling perichoresis in the Trinity discloses not an enclosed nature confined to the divine realm; rather its dynamics stretches outwardly. The outward effect of the inner divine communion is the creation of humanity and the world

⁶⁷Ibid..

⁶⁸Ibid., pp.146f.

⁶⁹Ibid..

⁷⁰Ibid..

so that all creatures can partake in the divine communion:

By their own inner dynamic, the three divine Persons spill over outwards, creating other different things and beings (the cosmos and humankind) for them to be receptacles of the transfusion of communicative love and the boundless ocean of trinitarian life.⁷¹

The Spirit and Jesus Christ through their acts in the worldly sphere inspire the 'transformation' of the human plight, and this essentially means the inauguration of the ever progressing eschatological kingdom of God. God wills us to be united in his communion (John 17:21), whatever race, class, and sex we are (Gal.3:28; cf. Rom.10:12). Therefore, we can say, Boff adds, that the Trinity still has a future ahead (1Cor. 15:28) since men and women have not yet been fully integrated into the communion of the Trinity.⁷²

Boff says that the theological consideration of the trinitarian communion necessarily "produces a critical attitude to personhood, community, society and the church".⁷³ For example, he considers the two most conspicuous modern developments of personhood – represented by the capitalist and the socialist ideals: individualism and collectivism. Boff argues that in the liberal -capitalist society, the rights of individuals are heightened and thus the individual person's relational identity to the wider society is destroyed, the consequence being the great divisions between rich and poor, races, and

⁷¹Ibid., p.147.

⁷²Ibid., p.148.

⁷³Ibid., pp.148-154.

sexes. It is the trinitarian thought which sees people as image and likeness of the Trinity that encourages individual persons into active relationship with others. A socialist regime, in this sense, may appear to suggest a sound principle. However, as it focusses on the society as a whole, the consequence is collectivism, in which people's individual identity disappears into the homogenized whole of the society. This contradicts the trinitarian principle that the condition of unity is respect for individual differences. In this way, the trinitarian communion offers the norms by which the patterns of current social regimes can be judged.

"Trinitarian communion is", however, "a source of inspiration rather of criticism in the social sphere", Boff claims.⁷⁴ It inspires people to move towards unity in plurality and plurality in unity as desirable principles of social structure. In the trinitarian principle, each individual person upholds the differences of other people, and gives himself totally to the others; there is no domination of one over the others. It is this inspiration from trinitarian communion that leads people to re-construct their society on the basis of fellowship, equality, mutual giving, and respect for individual differences.

Trinitarian communion also provides some critical norms to evaluate the organization of the church.⁷⁵ Generated from pre-trinitarian monotheism, and inspired by the principle of Ignatius of Antioch, the church has maintained a monarchical hierarchy of structure up to this day. Although this administration system has its own merits, it does restrain individual spirituality and creativity. Differences of spiritual and

⁷⁴Ibid., p.151.

⁷⁵Ibid., p.152.

intellectual opinions were met by the policing of the ecclesiastical authority, often ending up with canonical penalty or excommunication. Ecclesiastical unity should instead express trinitarian communion, concentrating on communion rather than hierarchy, on service rather than power, for the good for all.

To sum up, Boff sees the being of the Trinity, that is, the perichoretic communion of Father, Son and Spirit, as a conceptual foundation on which society, ecclesiastical organisations, and interpersonal relationships must be built up. God is the three Persons in loving communion from and to all eternity. Therefore, no one of the Three is anterior or posterior in ontological terms, and thus there is no generic dependency or theogony between them. If the human being is made in the image and likeness of God, and thus in the image and likeness of the Trinity, then there is a good reason why the human society should seek a model for its constitutional form based on the Trinity. The example of the Trinity gives us critical norms by which we can judge our present social regimes and inspires us as to how we must rebuild our society. Moreover, God's creation, redemption, and eschatological consummation are all a process of 'liberation' of his creatures, just as much as the Father is "origin and goal of all liberation", the Son "mediator of integral liberation", and the Spirit "the driving force of integral liberation".⁷⁶ In this process, our faith in God as liberating Trinity, and our search for a model for human society and relationships, are consistent.

⁷⁶These designations are directly derived from the titles of the chapters (in his book) which Boff allocates to the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

LaCugna

While Boff's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity may be seen as radical in content and motivation, LaCugna takes a more conventional approach. Unlike Moltmann, however, who is concerned with providing a general dogmatic guideline for modern theology, LaCugna concentrates on a number of concepts which she believes have critical importance in the understanding of the Trinity. She maintains that trinitarian theology from the Cappadocians to recent years has failed to deliver a proper account of the ontology of the Trinity. She believes that the remedy is to redefine some fundamental concepts concerning trinitarian ontology, and that only in this way can Christian faith in God be truly practical.

LaCugna declares that "the doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life".⁷⁷ She holds that until the recent past, trinitarian theology had largely been confined to theory and had done little for the practice of Christian faith. The main reason lies in the developments of the doctrine of God (since the fourth century) which has concentrated on intra-divine reality and spoken of God in isolation from the consideration of the economy of salvation. Trinitarian theology which initially sought to establish a doctrine based on the biblical witness to the economy of salvation has gradually changed into a theology of a transcendent God; in more technical terms, a separation between '*oikonomia*' (the economy of salvation) and '*theologia*' (the eternal being of God). The major outcomes are therefore the existence of two different doctrines of God (God as One, and God as Three), degradation

⁷⁷C.M.LaCugna, God For Us, p.1.

of the doctrine of the Trinity as a secondary Christian doctrine, and the separation of the doctrine from other theological doctrines as well as other areas of practical theology such as ecclesiology and worship and prayer. The doctrine of the Trinity is, however, not about God's 'internal self-relatedness' but about how the ineffable and invisible God invites us, in the Son through the Holy Spirit, to communion with himself (divinization) and ultimately with all creatures. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us concretely about all aspects of our Christian life and the world in which we live. There is only one Christian reality: there is only one God who is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in communion, and who reveals himself in the Son and the Spirit and gathers us together into his communion. We know God, the triune God, only as he is revealed to us in the history of redemption, and this God is truly and fully God himself. There is no other God apart from this triune God. Consequently, there is no '*theologia*' in separation from '*oikonomia*'. The trinitarian theology that is established on the basis of this union of '*oikonomia*' and '*theologia*', can provide us with a doctrine of the Trinity which is "a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life".

LaCugna's book God For Us consists of two parts. In the first part, she explains how the doctrine of the Trinity was 'defeated' in the development of the trinitarian theology, how '*oikonomia*' was separated from '*theologia*'. In the second part, she suggests how this defeated trinitarian doctrine should be reconstructed. It is the latter part that is more concerned in this study, that is, how she thinks the doctrine of the Trinity should be 're-conceived'. I will mainly concentrate on LaCugna's two main themes: the methodology of reconstruction in the unity of '*oikonomia*' and '*theologia*', and the ontology of God as Persons in communion.

As indicated earlier, LaCugna claims that the doctrine of the Trinity today has to be reconstructed by relating *oikonomia* with *theologia*.⁷⁸ The starting point for this reconstruction begins where Karl Rahner finished. LaCugna regards highly the contribution of Rahner to modern trinitarian theology. He has closed the gap between the *oikonomia* and *theologia* that had for long period been separated from each other. The central principles of Rahner's theology are the identification of 'economic' Trinity with 'immanent' Trinity, and the self-communicating nature of God.⁷⁹ The immanent Trinity is God self-communicating between Father, Son and Spirit. The economic Trinity is the manifestation of this eternal self-communication in the sphere of time in the person of Jesus and the activity of the Spirit. The Trinity manifested in history is the reality of God as he is in eternity. There is no ontological difference between the immanent and economic Trinity; the difference is only conceptual. The incarnation is the proof for the identification between immanent and economic Trinity.⁸⁰ In other words, no one else in the Godhead could have become incarnated but the Logos, the Son. The mission of the Son manifests the 'intradivine' procession of the Son who is eternally begotten of the Father. If the Son was not incarnated, there would be no way for us to know that God is triune. This means that God revealed in Christ and the Spirit, and the mystery of God as he is, are two aspects of one self-communication of God. For this reason, the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa. Consequently,

⁷⁸Ibid., pp.209-241.

⁷⁹K.Rahner, The Trinity, p.24.

⁸⁰Ibid., p.27.

by the principle that relates the salvation economy to the nature of God, he has provided the possibility of connecting various theological themes – such as the doctrines of grace, christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology – that used to be dealt separately by different theological enterprises.

Only this far, however, does LaCugna agree with Rahner. She insists that his trinitarian doctrine needs careful qualification. The question is: Are the economic and the immanent Trinity ontologically identical in the strict sense?⁸¹ LaCugna argues that if they are strictly identical, then dogmatic theology exclusively focussed on the immanent Trinity would already have sufficiently treated the economic Trinity.⁸² She maintains that there is no clear ontological identity between them or, therefore, between divine essence and divine energy, in the virtue of the fact that the economy of salvation does not efface God's mystery.⁸³

LaCugna's conclusion so far, drawn from Rahner's theology but qualified in the light of the biblical and ante-Nicene vision, is that "*theologia* is fully revealed and bestowed in *oikonomia*, and *oikonomia* truly expresses the ineffable mystery of *theologia*."⁸⁴ Where LaCugna's thought departs from Rahner's is in that the latter conceptualizes 'two' levels of the 'one' self-communication of God in the history of salvation, in the economy of the Son and the Spirit: God's self-communication *ad intra*

⁸¹LaCugna, *God For Us*, pp.216ff.

⁸²Ibid., p.217-221.

⁸³Ibid., p.220.

⁸⁴Ibid., p.221.

and *ad extra*.⁸⁵ It is as if the economy is the echo of some hidden intradivine reality, but the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity is not ontological but only conceptual. She claims that “the biblical and pre-Nicene sense of the economy is the one dynamic movement of God (Father) outward, a personal self-sharing by which God is forever bending toward God’s ‘other’”.⁸⁶ There is only one, not two, realities of the self-communicating God. *Oikonomia* and *theologia* are two aspects of one ontological reality, that is, “the mystery of divine-human communion”. This one dynamic movement of God can be compared to a parabola – metaphorically speaking – starting from above, moving downwards, and again curving upwards to reach to where it has started. God’s movement starts from his mystery in the manifestation of himself in this world and again it is lifted up to his eternally ineffable mystery.⁸⁷ In this case, the so-called immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are contained in one category.

LaCugna states, “There is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the *oikonomia* that is the concrete realization of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space, history, and personality”.⁸⁸ In other words, “*Theologia* is what is given in *oikonomia* and *oikonomia* expresses *theologia*.”⁸⁹ There is only one starting point, the *oikonomia*. This way of conceptuality brings together the ideas of ‘God’ and ‘God with

⁸⁵Ibid., p.222.

⁸⁶Ibid..

⁸⁷Ibid., pp.221-24.

⁸⁸Ibid., p.223.

⁸⁹Ibid., p.224.

us' into one reality of God, who gives himself completely to human beings so as to unite us with him but his mystery nonetheless remains unchanged.

Does this mean that the idea of the immanent Trinity or 'God *in se*' is entirely illegitimate? Certainly, LaCugna does not suggest it. She never argues that the economy of salvation alone explains everything about the inner being of God. If it did, she would not have spoken of '*theologia*' or the union of *theologia* and *oikonomia* at all. The problem with talking about 'God *in se*', she believes, is that we cannot establish any understanding of God apart from the economy of salvation. Theories about God's inner life independent of the consideration of God's self-communication in salvation history are not only 'unverifiable' but also are 'untheological'.⁹⁰ Any attempt to discuss God purely on the basis of intradivine life would immediately eclipse the economy of salvation. Therefore, while it is legitimate to speculate upon the intradivine pattern of the Trinity, it nonetheless has to be on the basis of the economic salvation history.

LaCugna proposes the terms and concepts of economic and immanent Trinity be dropped altogether in trinitarian theology⁹¹ – presumably because using them can be misleading and can serve to separate the one reality of God into two ontological levels, the characteristic post-Nicene problem of preoccupation with intradivine distinctions. She suggests that the terms *oikonomia* and *theologia* should be used instead. She stresses that the meaning of *oikonomia* is not the same as that of 'the Trinity *ad extra*'. *Oikonomia* denotes "the comprehensive plan of God reaching from creation to

⁹⁰Ibid., pp.227, 229.

⁹¹Ibid., pp.223f.

consummation, in which God and all creatures are destined to exist together in the mystery of love and communion".⁹² *Theologia* is not the same as 'the Trinity *in se*', but "the mystery of God". Here her intention is clear, whereas the terms immanent and economic Trinity have a considerable gap between them, *oikonomia* and *theologia* are quite compatible and complementary with each other.

For LaCugna, the central concept in the ontological theology is that of person. She argues that the nature of God's being is personal.⁹³ This also means that God cannot be depicted as some sort of 'substance' – a static, impersonal, self-contained, being. The concept of 'person' further brings in the notion of relationality or other-wardness: relational ontology. Without such relationality a person does not exist. One becomes personal in his or her interaction with others. In the trinitarian theology, God is personal; God in his freedom communicates with human beings and the world – although he himself is already the self-communicating God. She claims that "person is the ecstatic and relational mode of being", and therefore, the central concern about the ontology of God lies in "the concrete manifestation of God's personal reality revealed in the face of Jesus Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit".⁹⁴

LaCugna's treatment of the concept of person as the theological definition of the being of God as relational is largely indebted to Cappadocian theology. She claims that her conclusion is drawn from a compromised conception between the Greek and the

⁹²Ibid., p.223.

⁹³Ibid., pp.243-305.

⁹⁴Ibid., p.305.

Latin conceptions of person.⁹⁵ In fact, however, this seems to be only a political gesture: her conceptual position is ^{pre-}dominantly Greek. The Cappadocians' notable contribution to trinitarian theology is found in their idea of person as relation or being as relation, thereby establishing "the first real doctrine of the Trinity", LaCugna says.⁹⁶ By the notion of *ousia*, they could speak both of the unique union and distinction of the persons of the Trinity, without postulating an additional substance underlying them. In this ontology, 'relation' or 'person' was the mode of God's being, *ousia*. Personhood or relation was not an additional substance to the being of God but 'how' God exists. This showed an example of 'how' being (in general) exists: 'Being is personal and relational'. Consequently, the idea of God as person, not substance, could be easily developed – resisting Greek cosmology of necessary emanation (represented by Plato and Plotinus) – towards the principle that the world originates out of the freedom and love of a personal God.

Then, what makes God move towards us? What is the ground for his relation to us? The Cappadocian answer is that the Father causes everything to exist, even the Son and the Spirit. God is by nature the originating principle as person and in love, self-diffusion, and fecundity. God is the cause and at the same time the 'effect' of this cause, in the sense that God causes himself to exist in the persons of the Son and the Spirit.⁹⁷ This last expression of LaCugna can mislead the reader into drawing a pantheistic

⁹⁵Ibid., pp.243-250.

⁹⁶Ibid., p.243.

⁹⁷Ibid., p.245.

conclusion if the idea is applied to the creation of the world without an accompanying *ex nihilo* clause. Nonetheless, LaCugna's point in this discussion of the Cappadocian ontology is clear in her quotation from J. Zizioulas: ". . . God 'exists' on account of a person, the Father, and not on account of a substance."⁹⁸

According to LaCugna, once the principle of a personal God, that is, the relational ontology of the Cappadocians is established, the following principles emerge.⁹⁹ Firstly, in talking about God we cannot use language such as, 'by himself' or 'in and of himself', as if God is self-contained. Secondly, we cannot suppose an impersonal or prepersonal divine substance underlying the Trinity. Thirdly, we cannot assign the doctrine of God into separate themes, such as *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*. Fourthly, we cannot separate *theologia* and *oikonomia* from each other.

LaCugna claims that even the Latin tradition, based on the teachings of Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas, also developed a relational ontology in its own way.¹⁰⁰ Augustine explained the being of God as the relation between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, thus establishing a social nature for the being of God. Nevertheless, the relationality was confined within the divine sphere. Augustine placed his emphasis mainly on the introspection of the self. The natural consequence was the divorce of theology of God from the economy of salvation. In Greek theology, on the other hand, the relationality was beyond the scope of 'intradivine substance': God's nature as person

⁹⁸J.D.Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pp. 41f.

⁹⁹LaCugna, *God For Us*, pp.245f.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p.247-249.

and relation is not only manifested but also completed in the economy of redemption and deification. Notwithstanding this and other differences between Greek and Latin traditions, one agreement is found in the principle that “personhood is the meaning of being”.

LaCugna’s relational ontology is not confined to the notions of personhood and relationship; to these she adds ‘communion’ as part of the modality of all existence. LaCugna’s theology starts from the principle of relational ontology derived from Greek theology and also from the consideration of other contemporary theories of person,¹⁰¹ that “the meaning to-be is to-be-a-person-in-communion.” She maintains that “God’s To-Be is To-Be-in-relationship, and God’s being-in-relationship-to-us is what God is”.¹⁰² This insight is consistent with what was mentioned earlier, that is, the *oikonomia* manifests the *theologia*. In this sense, the economy is “the communion of all in all, all in God, God in all”.¹⁰³ The doctrine of the Trinity does not belong to the realm of speculation on God in himself, but it belongs to “the realm of reflection on God-for-us as revealed in creation, in the face of Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit who brings about communion between God and creature”.¹⁰⁴ This conforms to

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp.255-288. These include John Macmurray’s philosophy (*The Self as Agent*, NY, 1957; *Persons in Relation*, NY, 1961), John Zizioulas’ neo-patristic synthesis (*Being as Communion*), feminist theology and Latin American liberation theology, and Catholic and Orthodox ethics.

¹⁰²LaCugna, *God For Us*, p.250.

¹⁰³Ibid., p.249.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p.250.

LaCugna's catch phrase that "the doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical implications for Christian life".

More concretely, in what sense does LaCugna say that the doctrine of the Trinity is a practical doctrine for Christian life? LaCugna's answer would be that since God is personal, Christian life is grounded on the personal relationship between the believers and God who is revealed in Christ and the Spirit. We are no more to speculate on God in terms of a hidden, mysterious, transcendental substance. On the contrary, God meets us in a person to person relationship through the concrete humanity of Jesus and the activity of the Spirit, in the concrete history of creation, redemption and deification. The person of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit are the norm for trinitarian ontology and for Christian life.¹⁰⁵

As we have seen so far, LaCugna's trinitarian theology is focussed on the concept of the relational ontology of God. In LaCugna's language the *oikonomia* manifests the *theologia*; this is to say, however paradoxical it may be, that the Trinity in the salvation history reveals what God is without effacing his mystery. It appears that LaCugna is maintaining that God *in se* is practically unknowable. Perhaps a slightly more intelligible conclusion would be that the Trinity revealed in the salvation history is fully God himself in a worldly environment but the same Trinity in the divine realm remains as mystery.

Consequently, for LaCugna what is unknowable must be left unknown rather than speculating on it, for such speculation would make the Christian faith and life

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp.292-305.

grounded on ambiguous and unverifiable truths. This view is largely shared with Gunton, in whose trinitarian theology 'the unknowability of God' is the prime presupposition. Gunton maintains that God is not knowable ontologically but knowable only relationally. Thus God's ontological nature itself must be relational.

Gunton

Gunton's trinitarian thought is well expressed in his recent edition of The Promise of Trinitarian Theology. In this book, he concentrates primarily on reviewing and reshaping our traditional trinitarian theology in the context of modern conditions, especially in the light of the modern atheistic challenges to Christianity in general. Due to the nature of this book – consisting of a number of separate essays and lectures – it is not easy to derive a comprehensive and systematic view from it. Nevertheless it is possible to abstract some characteristic features of his trinitarian thought. Perhaps Gunton's trinitarian theology can be seen as having two broad themes: the ontology of the personal-relational Trinity, and the trinitarian implication for the human being and the world – or the principle of 'everything looks different in the light of the Trinity'.¹⁰⁶

Gunton argues that traditional trinitarian theology is largely problematic in attempting to face the modern atheistic challenges to the Christian faith, as it was in the Enlightenment. The recently renewed interests in trinitarian theology in the form of debates and attempts at reshaping the doctrine of the Trinity are all a conscious reaction to the problems inherited in the traditional theology. The problems are, firstly, Western

¹⁰⁶C.E.Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, p.28.

'theism', for which Augustine and the doctrine of the Filioque are mainly responsible, and secondly, the lack of existential accounts, in the trinitarian theology, of the meaning of the Christian faith and the Church in relation to our concrete life in this concrete world.¹⁰⁷

Gunton claims that these problems can be solved by trinitarian insight based on the ontology of the Trinity.¹⁰⁸ Most of all, Christianity should deal with the modern challenges by arguing that God is the God who has entered into saving relationship with us in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁹ This vision must be accompanied by the view that "what God did then is argued to provide the pattern, so to speak, for what he does now."¹¹⁰ In other words, through Christian worship, life and thought, believers are drawn into relationship to God, that is, to the Father through Jesus in the Spirit. For Gunton, the task of the theology of the Trinity is to articulate this insight intellectually.¹¹¹

Again, what is required for theology is the ontology of the triune God, the definite conceptual foundation by which all meaning of human life and the world can be elucidated.¹¹² The triune God is the reality and not a philosophical or ideological construction. The history of the church shows that the self-giving God has been turned into a authoritarian God serving the purpose of political ideologies. In effect, the same

¹⁰⁷ibid., p.2

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp.15f.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p.17.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p.18.

¹¹¹Ibid., pp.19f.

¹¹²Ibid., pp.26-29.

thing is happening in the thought of modern atheists – such as Don Cupitt who has replaced the God-centred value by a human-centred one.¹¹³ “The idea of the triune God is”, Gunton quotes from Coleridge, “what it is because it is a given – not a construct – which contains the clue to everything else...”¹¹⁴ Therefore, our concern must focus, beyond the scope of personal salvation, on our present standing in which we should understand ourselves as participants of the trinitarian order of the world.¹¹⁵

Perhaps two of the most important concepts in Gunton’s trinitarian ontology are ‘otherness’ and ‘relation’. This means that the doctrine of the Trinity should offer further conceptual possibilities not confined to concern about the being of God. The doctrine that being is communion involves four central concepts: “person, relation, otherness and freedom”.¹¹⁶ Amongst these concepts, the ‘person’ is the most important, since it presupposes the other three. ‘A person’ suggests ‘relations with other persons’ – thus distinguished from ‘an individual’ which denotes ‘separation from’ other individuals.¹¹⁷ The concept of freedom is also discerned from the concept of person if the relationship between persons is understood as “a free and mutually constitutive relationship”.¹¹⁸

¹¹³Ibid., pp.26f. For Don Cupitt’s thought, refer to Taking Leave of God.

¹¹⁴Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Notes on Waterland’s Vindication of Christ’s Divinity’, The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. W.G.T. Shedd (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1853), vol. 5, p.407. Quoted in Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, p.28.

¹¹⁵Ibid..

¹¹⁶Ibid., p.11.

¹¹⁷Ibid..

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp.11f.

For Gunton, the importance of these concepts is that they enable us to characterise the being of God without violating the unknowability of God. They provide “ways of characterising the personal being of God without encroaching on his unknowableness”.¹¹⁹ For this reason, Gunton suggests the equivalent but more general terms ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’ be replaced by otherness and relation. Speaking of transcendence, rather than otherness, leads to a quantitative interpretation, raising questions for modern theology about how much transcendence is to be allowed in talking about God. Moreover, transcendence can be conceived as the qualitative antonym of immanence – as if the more transcendent God is to be the less immanent God and vice versa. Not only do otherness and relation do a better job than what transcendence and immanence are meant to do, but they have the advantage of co-relating between them.¹²⁰

The result of Gunton’s concepts of otherness and relation is the insight that the creatures (human beings and the world) are ‘the others’ to God the Trinity and thus have relation with him.¹²¹ About otherness, Gunton says,

Otherness – the ontological distinction or infinite qualitative difference between God and that which is not God – is important both for the contingency of the created order and for the freedom of the human person.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p.201.

¹²⁰Ibid., p.202.

¹²¹Cf., *ibid.*, pp.8-12.

In a trinitarian understanding, because God has otherness – personal freedom and ‘space’ – within the dynamics of his being, he is able to grant to the world space to be itself.¹²²

Any form of monistic idea, in which the concept of otherness cannot be maintained, eliminates any possibility of relation between God and the human being and the world, and destroys ‘the freedom of the world to be itself’.¹²³ Unlike pantheism, the concept of otherness secures the freedom of the world, giving it its legitimate place of being as a being which is not God, that is, as the ‘other’ to God. Further, the inevitable consequence is our realisation of ourselves (human beings) as the ‘other’ to the world. The concept of otherness thus illuminates the relationship between the finite beings: the human being and that which is not.¹²⁴

Gunton, however, stresses that otherness must not be conceived in separation from ‘relation’, and relation from otherness.¹²⁵ Without the personal relation of God to the world, the world will lapse into the being of God, resulting in pantheism. The notion required here is that of ‘otherness in relation’. In the trinitarian understanding of creation, the world is to be understood not only as the product of a free creative act but also as the

¹²²Ibid..202

¹²³Ibid..

¹²⁴Ibid., pp.202f.

¹²⁵Ibid., p.203.

product of 'a continuing free relatedness'.¹²⁶

Apart from the trinitarian implication concerning the relation between God and human being and the world, Gunton holds, there are other important implications in the doctrine of the Trinity. These include the implications for the church, for the human society, and for the world. Firstly, as established by Christ and the Spirit, the church reflects the communion of God. The church is "a being of persons-in-relation" just as God is Persons in communion, since the church has received its character from God in relation to God as the other.¹²⁷ Secondly, the doctrine of the Trinity also illuminates the nature of the human being in society. The modern trend often defines human beings in society in terms of individualism or/and collectivism. Under the trinitarian prospective, however, the person is neither an individual separated from others, nor merely the one dissolved in the collective. Rather, just as God is the three unique Persons in perichoretic union by virtue of otherness-in-relation, so is the human society which is constituted with unique individual persons in free dynamic union.¹²⁸ Thirdly, the world, though impersonal, has its legitimate existence as the 'other' to God. The world was created by the Trinity – as was the human being – and it has its destiny alongside the human creature to be offered in the purpose of the Creator.¹²⁹

One of the most notable features of Gunton's trinitarian theology is his

¹²⁶Ibid..

¹²⁷Ibid., p.12.

¹²⁸Ibid., p.13.

¹²⁹Ibid., p.14.

vehement criticism of Augustine's treatment of the Trinity. Gunton claims that the Western trinitarian tradition has fundamentally deviated from the concept of God which first took its form in the Nicene church. The Enlightenment, and further the modern atheistic challenge to the Christian faith are all due to Augustine's distortion of the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers.

Augustine developed a monotheistic concept of God which has been continued in the Western concepts of the Trinity. The result was a variety of political and ecclesiastic uses of an authoritarian God as shown in the history of the church and also the loss of human values in the Enlightenment.¹³⁰ In arguing this, Gunton constantly contrasts Augustine's theology to that of the Cappadocian Fathers, in whom Gunton finds proper trinitarian ideas.

According to Gunton, the defects of Augustine's approach to the doctrine may be summed as the follows.¹³¹ First, he sought an analogy of the threeness without counting the economy of salvation; the consequence was that he could not connect the ontology of God with what he does in time. Second, he developed the principle that the outward action of the Trinity is not divided (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*). This suggests that there is no distinctiveness of action that can be ascribed to the Father, the Son or to the Spirit. In this case, there is no need to distinguish between the three 'Persons', and the concept of the Trinity is redundant in our understanding of the ways God works for us. Third, Augustine did not provide an adequate formula to identify each

¹³⁰Ibid., pp.30-55.

¹³¹Ibid..

person of the Trinity, due to his psychological concept of the person. Therefore, God is only thought of in his oneness. For Augustine, the concept of the economy carries much less significance than what he is in himself.

For Gunton, Augustine's formation of such a monotheistic concept of God has several causes. The first is the breach in the doctrine of the unknowability of God.¹³² Gunton says that we only understand God 'relationally' but not 'absolutely'.¹³³ The problem of the deep-rooted scepticism about the existence and knowability of God in the modern world was not initiated with Kant; such atheistic trends are due to a theological tradition that is ascribed to Augustine who failed to maintain the principle of the unknowability of God.¹³⁴ The second cause is Augustine's platonist philosophy with its anti-material tendency. The natural consequence is the transformation of Christ's humanity into a 'docetic' Christology, and the separation of God from the economic Trinity. The third cause is Augustine's misinterpretation of the Cappadocian ontology of the Trinity – the concepts of 'person' and 'relation'.¹³⁵ On seeking for an intellectually comprehensible analogy for the Trinity, Augustine unwittingly but "radically" changed the tradition. The Cappadocians used the Greek *hypostasis* in distinction from *ousia* to refer to the particularity of each Person of the Godhead. Augustine did not understand

¹³²Ibid., pp.30-33.

¹³³Ibid., p.193.

¹³⁴Ibid., pp.30f.

¹³⁵Ibid., pp.38-42.

why the distinction between the words was so important to the Cappadocians.¹³⁶ For the Cappadocians, the central concern was ontology: 'the three persons are what they are in their relations'. Augustine conceived 'relation' in a logical rather than an ontological dimension. The consequence was that the particularity of the persons was dismissed to make room for the oneness of God. One inevitable consequence of such a theology is a tendency towards modalism, which is found in most Western theology, a legacy of Augustinian teaching.¹³⁷

So far we have seen what I believe to be the main features of Gunton's trinitarian thought. It is found that, in his interest in the 'relational' ontology of the Trinity, Gunton's theological position is largely Eastern rather than Western. Nonetheless, he shows a great interest in establishing a neutral theological environment in which the Western and the Eastern churches can be reconciled. However, for Gunton this does not necessarily mean a theological compromise – as is largely the impression given in Moltmann's theology. On the contrary, Gunton's approach is more critical. Given the limited space, we shall note only a couple of points of Gunton in their dogmatic details.

What is the cause of the 'communion' in the Trinity? Is it the Father, or the three persons together? Gunton argues that it is the latter: the communion does not derive from a programming of the Father but from the free choice of the three persons.¹³⁸

¹³⁶Ibid., p.40. Cf., St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V.10.

¹³⁷Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p.42.

¹³⁸Ibid., p.196.

The opposite position was held by Irenaeus, who described the Son and the Spirit as 'the two hands of God' in creative and redemptive acts of the Father, and more recently by John D. Zizioulas, who sees the Father as the cause of communion in the Trinity¹³⁹. Against this he argues that there is no ontological hierarchy in the Trinity; the priority of the Father is "not ontological but economic".¹⁴⁰ What appears to be a subordination of the Son to the Father in the economy does not impair the equal deity of the Son with the Father: "It is as truly divine to be the obedient self-giving Son as it is to be the Father who sends and the Spirit who renews and perfects".¹⁴¹

Gunton points out that the doctrine of the *Filioque* of the West has a few weaknesses, while the Eastern alternative can also cause problems. The principle of *Filioque* may suggest subordination of the Spirit to the Son, and in this case, the Spirit's function is to be understood as little more than what Christ does to the believer, the church. In the Eastern position, on the other hand, the work of the Spirit may be conceived in separation from the work of Christ. To avoid such difficulties, we should pay attention to the concept of the 'self-effacing' Spirit:

the Spirit's primary function is to lead to Christ, the way to the Father. That encapsulates the essential asymmetry of the relationships in the economy of salvation. The

¹³⁹Zizioulas, Being as Communion, pp.40ff.

¹⁴⁰Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, p.196.

¹⁴¹Ibid..

Spirit is the giver of faith, not in himself not even, strictly speaking, in Christ, but in the Father through Christ.¹⁴²

In the economy, it is the self-effacing nature of the Spirit which makes the co-work possible – though the Spirit still has his distinctive function alongside those of the Father and the Son.

To sum up, Gunton finds that the Western trinitarian tradition is defective to meet modern conditions and impotent to offer existential accounts of the Christian faith relevant to our present concrete life. Gunton stresses that this is largely due to Augustine's monistic ontology of God and the accompanying psychological conception of person, that have become the foundation of Western theology. Above all, God has to be understood as personal, with God internally constituted as three Persons in 'relation' and 'otherness'. The concept of person, derived from the being of God as such, premises otherness (to that which is not God) in relation. As such, Gunton stresses that there is not 'a fixed model' in trinitarian theology.¹⁴³ In this insight, Gunton argues that theologians are "to show the doctrine of the Trinity not as a closed dogma, to be swallowed or not as the case may be, but as a continuing enterprise of conceptual refinement and development".¹⁴⁴ Gunton thus believes in the necessity for an openness to conceptual possibilities and for continuous reshaping in trinitarian theology.

¹⁴²Ibid., p.199.

¹⁴³Ibid., p.195.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p.204.

So far we have seen what Moltmann, Boff, LaCugna, and Gunton have to say about the Trinity. It is clear that all these theologians are deeply concerned with the necessity of reshaping the traditional trinitarian thought. They believe that the trinitarian theology has deviated in the process of developments from the understanding of the early church's understanding of relational ontology. They find the true expression of the being of the Trinity in the vision of the early church and insist that we should recover the original trinitarian ontology by discovering where later reflection diverged from the original form of thought and correcting it. In line with this, they also stress the economic history of salvation as the base on which trinitarian doctrine must be established, in the belief that what God does in history must tell us what God is in himself. They believe that only in this light can the doctrine of the Trinity be a practical doctrine that directly concerns our concrete life in worship.

CHAPTER II

A critical assessment of the four theologians

As has been implied in the previous discussions, the thought of the four writers have many points of agreement. Nevertheless, we cannot yet readily characterise these theologians, putting them in the same category merely because of that fact. Neither their theoretical approaches to the same dogmatic themes are always identical, nor their theological aims always the same. We also need to identify their individual differences. Therefore, before making any definite conclusions about their agreements, it seems necessary to offer some further reflection on their individual theological positions. In this section we will attempt a more general theological assessment.

Moltmann

First of all, Moltmann's key role in the development of modern trinitarian theology is worth noting. He tries to convey clearly and without hesitation what he believes is right, taking radical approaches if he thinks it necessary.¹⁴⁵ His theology makes a particular contribution in opening up new directions, especially in his relational understanding of God and the world.

¹⁴⁵Such as his treatments on the concept of the 'suffering God' (Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, Ch. II) and the trinitarian history of the kingdom of God (Ch.VI).

Moltmann's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is to a considerably extent existential. A notable example of this approach is his special regard for history. Christ lived in the temporal world, and human beings continuously confront God in this world and in time. Thus it can be said that space and time is the place where God meets us.¹⁴⁶ It is also for this reason, as Moltmann claims, that the New Testament must be the starting point of trinitarian theology.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Moltmann's starting points for his doctrinal theology are often general, practical, and existential standpoints that are agreeable with contemporary understanding of the human life. In other words, his theology is from 'below to above' and from practice to theory.

Moltmann is clearly convinced that the New Testament provides no evidence for a monotheistic ontology of God. For him, God is basically three Persons – although he also stresses the divine perichoretic union. For this and other reasons, he firmly rejects monotheistic views of God. He finds that not only the psychological trinitarian view of God formulated by Augustine and Aquinas suffers from defects but also that Barth's and Rahner's modalistic understanding of the Triunity are inconsistent with the New Testament witness. Moltmann believes that both Augustine's teaching of God being merely one Person 'outwardly' and Barth's self-revealing God as Lord and Rahner's threefold God are all fundamentally a monotheism. Moltmann emphasises that monotheism essentially destroys freedom, the freedom that he believes characterises the purpose of God's creative acts. According to Moltmann, monotheism leads to man's self-

¹⁴⁶Cf. Robert W. Jenson, 'What is the Point of Trinitarian Theology', in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, ed. C. Schwöbel, p.40.

¹⁴⁷Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp.149.

destruction and is against God's purpose of creation and (eschatological) recreation. Appealing to political and ecclesiastic histories, Moltmann attempts to show that the consequence of monotheism is the loss of freedom. Theoretically speaking, it is rather difficult – if not impossible – to derive a monotheistic God from Moltmann's theology, if we consider the emphasis he puts on the uniqueness of each of the relationships as well as the uniqueness of each of the 'generations' (or 'processions') between the three Persons of the Trinity.¹⁴⁸

While Moltmann's repeated anti-monotheistic emphasis and the way he represents the alternative – the trinitarian patterns of the works of God – delivers some convincing points, his theology is desperately weak in providing clear reasons how the three divine Persons are 'the Triune God', namely, how 'three' can be 'one'. In Moltmann's theology, the individual Persons of the Father, the Son and the Spirit are clearly distinguished from one another. They are ontologically three Persons. In his interpretation of the New Testament, he tries to show both the distinctiveness of the three Persons and the close interrelation between each of the divine works in history. However, the overall impression is – despite his stress on the divine interrelation – a clear ontological independence for each of the three Persons.

Another example leads to the same conclusion. Moltmann holds that the kingdom of God is a trinitarian history of the Triune God; the Father, the Son and the Spirit rule their appropriated kingdoms while in each Person's dominion the other Person(s) is (are) present with him. But 'the other Persons' role is not only subsidiary but

¹⁴⁸Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp.188-190.

in fact they do not do anything except 'anticipate' the coming kingdom(s) and 'presuppose' the previous kingdom(s). Here again, the ontological independence of the three Persons is obvious. In Moltmann's theology, it appears, the principle of perichoresis, the interpenetrating relationships between the three divine Persons is the only basis of how they are one and why they are one.¹⁴⁹ Even here, however, his concept of perichoresis illustrated by his term 'union' is too vague; it needs a more precise explanation of how the 'union' is conceived perichoretically. Consequently, it can be said that Moltmann's doctrine of the Triunity is open to the criticism of tritheism.

Another characteristic feature of Moltmann's theology is those elements which inspire Liberation theology,¹⁵⁰ more explicitly expressed and comprehensively developed by Boff. For Moltmann, the essential presupposition of the nature of the kingdom of God is freedom. The ultimate purpose of the world, designed by God, is the glorification of God, but this glorification is, for Moltmann, a synonym for a fulfilled, perfected freedom. He also describes the Son as 'liberator of men and women' and the nature of his rule in the kingdom of the Son as liberation. But as such his theology can be criticised on similar grounds as Liberation Theology in general, as we shall indicate later.

¹⁴⁹ Moltmann's explanation about how the 'three' are 'one' does not go beyond the following statements: "If the three divine subjects are co-active in this history, as we have shown they are, then the unity of the Trinity cannot be a monadic unity. The unity of the divine tri-unity lies in the *union* of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, not in their numerical unity. It lies in their *fellowship*, not in the identity of a single subject . . . The unity of Jesus the Son with the Father is a unity which preserves their separate character, indeed actually conditions it." Ibid., p.95.

¹⁵⁰ See W.Pannenberg, Christian Spirituality and Sacramental Community, chap.3.

A few more specific points may be made, regarding Moltmann's trinitarian thought. The first concerns the question of whether the doctrine of God is controlled or determined by the current trends of human conceptuality. Moltmann has introduced the historical development of the human concept of God in terms of the concepts of God as Supreme Substance, as Absolute Subject, and as the Absolute Personality – as a sequence of successive developments or a conceptual evolution.¹⁵¹ In this, he effectively implies that the third concept (Absolute Personality) that is the current fashion has directed contemporary theology towards a social trinitarian concept, thus enabling theologians today to come to terms with a trinitarian ontology of God. Here one implication is that the doctrine of God inevitably changes to conform to the currently fashionable or dominant philosophical view of the world. If, then, the current personal or sociological trend of thought changes into something else for the next evolutionary stage, will the current theological concept of God have to change accordingly? What if the new trend is, for example, a pantheistic view of the world; will we see many theologians shouting for a pantheistic God? Moltmann's systematic approach in discussing the changes of general human concepts of God has considerable academic value in the way he builds up the doctrine of God, but the logic can be misunderstood since it leaves the impression that the truth of trinitarian reality can always be changed if the general philosophical trend demands it. The way he has handled his logic results in an over-simplification and forced manipulation of ideas motivated by conceptual considerations and ignores that fact that God is immutable and always triune.

¹⁵¹Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp.10-20.

Another question is whether there is anything particularly new in Moltmann's approach to the New Testament.¹⁵² The way he articulates the triadic patterns of the divine co-work and relationships in different angles has some significance. It must be noted, however, that what is found by Moltmann in the New Testament is already transparent, and thus there is no reason to believe that the early Fathers did not notice what Moltmann – and the rest of us – have seen in the Bible today.¹⁵³ Although we acknowledge that the scriptures do not contain explicit and direct material for the doctrine, as Karl Barth agreed,¹⁵⁴ in the first place it is precisely the New Testament itself from which the early Fathers derived facts about God and eventually formulated the creed. The formation of the doctrine and the creed by the early church is the very proof that the early Fathers have seen what Moltmann sees today. To take one simple example of what Moltmann finds in the New Testament, at Jesus's baptism by John, there is a triadic pattern between the Father, the Son and the Spirit: the Spirit descended upon him and a voice was heard which said, "Thou art my beloved Son . . ." (Mark 1:9-11, Matt.3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34), and after the baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:1ff, Mark 1:12ff, Luke 4:1ff). As in this example and others it is not too difficult to discern a triadic pattern of the relationships between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Despite this, however, it

¹⁵²Moltmann, *ibid.*, pp.61-96.

¹⁵³Triadic forms of dynamic relations between the Trinity were already stressed by many modern New Testament writers before Moltmann's book, i.e., A.W.Wainwright, The Trinity in the New Testament, pp.257ff; G.S.Hendry, The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology, p.31. H.Lockyer, All the Doctrines of the Bible, p.125.

¹⁵⁴K.Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, p.381.

must be considered that the circumstances of the early Fathers were not the same as those of today. Moltmann does not seem to take account of the fact that the early Fathers had to rely much more readily than us on the biblical material in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. For, unlike them, Moltmann, like the rest of us, has an enormous advantage in being equipped not only with the biblical but also with various dogmatic formulations and the considerable amount of knowledge of the detailed pros and cons of such perspectives in the history of trinitarian theology. In this sense, one could even say that Moltmann is interpreting the New Testament on the basis of dogmatic material and traditions, rather than reshaping the doctrine of the Trinity solely by relying on the New Testament. What he presents on this subject will have already been considered in the fourth century. In many areas of life the first attempt is often more difficult than later attempts because there is no precedent to tell whether this attempt is appropriate or safe, but once some experience of failure is accumulated, it is much easier to see whether or not the new attempt would be appropriate and safe. The value of Moltmann's exposition of the Bible from which he derives his idea of trinitarian sociality of the divine Persons is not doubted, but it would be difficult to claim that it was totally new and revolutionary, or as dangerously innovative, as some have claimed.

Moltmann claims that his doctrine of the historical kingdom of God is trinitarian, but as a matter of fact, it is not strictly trinitarian in the perichoretic sense. He says that the three Persons look forward to the eschatological era of the kingdom of glory and are thus continuously present through the transitions. For example, the Father is so attached to the Son that he remains continuously present – but no specific activity is implied for the Father – in the kingdom of the Son or in the kingdom of the Spirit. The

same applies to the transition of the kingdom of the Son into the Spirit's kingdom in which all three Persons are finally present together – again no particular functions for the Son and the Father. In this view, it is only the third era, the kingdom of the Spirit, that a seemingly perichoretic rule of the three Persons is realised – yet the Father and the Son take only nominal roles. Finally, in the kingdom of glory, the ultimate goal of the kingdom of God, the three Persons become the co-rulers in the true sense. In this picture so far, none of the three kingdoms – excluding the fourth – is essentially a trinitarian kingdom. This means that Moltmann's doctrine of the kingdom of God is not substantially different from that of Joachim, despite the fact that Moltmann claims that his doctrine has been amended from Joachim's. The only clear difference between the two kingdoms of God as presented by Joachim and by Moltmann is that the latter's is an 'open system'.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, therefore, Moltmann's kingdoms of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are – if we strictly follow his claim – monotarian, binitarian and semi-trinitarian respectively.

Another problem with Moltmann's scheme of the kingdom of God concerns whether the form of appropriation he assigns to each of the three Persons in the dominion of their kingdom in question can be sustained.¹⁵⁶ In the New Testament, the main purpose of Jesus' saving work in liberating people from sin is so that, not merely they may become the servants of the Lord, but they may ultimately be obedient to the

¹⁵⁵Cf., *ibid.*, p.209. In Moltmann's language this 'open' means the openness that connects, firstly, the divine communion with human beings, and secondly, the present (and past) with the future by anticipation.

¹⁵⁶See R.Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, pp.179-182.

Father and worship him. In this case, therefore the idea of 'appropriation' is asymmetrical and somewhat inappropriate. More problematic still is the appropriation given to the Spirit. Considering the nature of the Spirit who, though abiding in us, effaces himself so that we are related to God as the body of Christ, it is difficult to conceive him as a ruler of his own appropriated kingdom. For, in what is meant to be his own kingdom, the dominion is not with the Spirit but the Father (and the Son). Richard Bauckham suggests that Moltmann's scheme would better be replaced with such as "the structure of the Christian experience of God, in which . . . we know God in three dimensions: as God above us (the Father), alongside us (Jesus, the Son), and within us (the Spirit)."¹⁵⁷

Probably one of the most conspicuous concepts in Moltmann's trinitarian theology concerns the relation between eschatology, the immanent Trinity, and the economic Trinity. Although in The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, the mutual connection between eschatology and the immanent and the economic Trinity is only implicitly expressed, it is worthwhile to have a brief look at it because not only is it important to understand Moltmann's trinitarian thought as a whole but also the concept appears to be also connected with his concept of freedom, that is dominant throughout his book and focussed especially in his treatment of the 'Kingdom of Freedom'.¹⁵⁸

Moltmann maintains that the immanent Trinity is eternally influenced by the economic Trinity and that the glory of the eschatological consummation determines the

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p.181.

¹⁵⁸Cf., Thomson, Modern Trinitarian Perspectives, p.33f.

final pattern of the immanent Trinity. This view is well summarised in the following statements.

The Trinity in the Sending is, from its eternal origin, open to the world and to men. For with this the history of God's seeking love is begun. The Trinity in the glorification is, from its eschatological goal, open for the gathering and uniting of men and the whole creation with God and in God.¹⁵⁹

On Moltmann's view, there is a sequence of three stages, or realities, of God:

- A. The immanent Trinity (as the origin of the Sending);
- B. The economic Trinity (who is influenced by his creation and consequently influences the 'original' immanent Trinity to change and continuously reshape himself);
- C. The immanent Trinity (now as the new, final, and the ultimate eschatological Trinity).

In stage A, the immanent Trinity is the origin of the economic Trinity; there is no oddity in this stage and it is in line with Barthian theology.¹⁶⁰ An unusual feature is found in the stage B. Firstly, the Trinity, now as the economic Trinity, is continuously influenced and changed in his experience of the world in time and space. In the meantime, and

¹⁵⁹J.Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit, p.60.

¹⁶⁰See R. Bauckham, 'Jürgen Moltmann' in P. Toon and J.D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity, p.126.

secondly, he is also influenced in his experience of himself, so to speak, by the interaction between the three Persons. Thirdly, in this stage he is thus undergoing a process of 'becoming in God'¹⁶¹, the culmination of which is realised in the eschatological consummation, 'the new creation at the end'.¹⁶² In the stage C, the Trinity is now not the same as the Trinity in stage A.¹⁶³

One unavoidable question is whether there are two aspects or realities of the immanent Trinity. Clearly, there is a great distance between Moltmann's view and that of Rahner who equated the immanent and the economic Trinity. If the eschatological Trinity is the real and true immanent Trinity, as Moltmann maintains, is the immanent Trinity of the Sending not real and true? Obviously, this view contradicts with the more traditional belief of the eternity of the immanent Trinity. Moreover, strictly speaking, if the Trinity is open to continuous influence and reshaping in the process of 'becoming in God' in his confrontation of his creatures, there is no clear distinction between creator and creature. This is "a trinitarian and eschatological panentheism"¹⁶⁴ and may end up being developing into a form of universalism or pantheism¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹Ibid..

¹⁶²Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit, p.59f.

¹⁶³Moltmann confirms this by saying "As a consequence the Trinity in glorification has the predominance and prominent before the Trinity in the Sending". J.Moltmann, 'The Trinitarian History of God,' in Theology, vol.78, 1975, p.645.

¹⁶⁴Bauckham, The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, p.17.

¹⁶⁵Thomson, op.cit., p.34.

This radical view of Moltmann can attract other questions such as 'Is God free?' Since the reality of the Trinity is so decisively determined by his experience of his creatures that it can be seen that God's freedom is accordingly limited. Many of us believe not only that God is immutable but also that God's freedom is not restricted by anything, and that he chooses to be what he wants to be regardless of the content of his confrontation with his creatures. Moltmann, on the other hand, holds that what he essentially is and what he does is influenced by his experience of his creatures. Not only does this make God a mutable God but it also depicts a God whose existence is subject to human control. The suspicion is that Moltmann is too much preoccupied by a political and social orientation, perhaps influenced by his bitter experience in youth as a political prisoner. The last chapter ('The Kingdom of Freedom') of his book The Trinity and the Kingdom of God shows that human freedom is really the key concept in his understanding of the constitution of the kingdom of God. As such it appears that in his theology, human freedom is so focussed that it has unwittingly deprived God of his freedom. The question is why God created the human being and the world. Is it because God wanted to be influenced by his own creatures, perhaps for the purpose of self-discipline (especially in the view of the suffering Father)¹⁶⁶, in order to become fully the very ultimate being that he is essentially supposed to be?

Moltmann seems to be conscious of this potential problem about the issue whether the suffering God is free or whether he is a prisoner of his own history.¹⁶⁷ He

¹⁶⁶Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, Chap.2, 'The Passion of God', pp.21-60, passim.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p.52.

claims that God is free; "his creative and suffering love is founded on his groundless decision".¹⁶⁸ Thus Moltmann opposes the view of Barth who said that

He [God] could have remained satisfied with Himself and with the impassible glory and blessedness of His own inner life. But he did not do so. He elected man as a covenant-partner.¹⁶⁹

This God has no need of us. This God is self-sufficient . . . He is not under any need of constraint.¹⁷⁰

God in His love elects another to fellowship with Himself. First and foremost this means that God makes a self-election in favour of this other. He ordains that He should not be entirely self-sufficient as He might be.¹⁷¹

In Barth's view, as Moltmann points out, God's freedom consists of the choices either to remain self-sufficient and content with himself, or to identify himself with his creatures and suffer with them.

¹⁶⁸Ibid..

¹⁶⁹K.Barth, Church Dogmatics, II/2, p.166.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., IV/2, p.346.

¹⁷¹Ibid., II/2, p.10.

Moltmann claims that God's freedom does not consist of such decisions; on the contrary, God has only one choice: God's freedom is manifested only in his 'will' to love the world. Moltmann argues that "If God is the truth in that he corresponds entirely to himself, then his revelation can only be true if he entirely corresponds to himself in that revelation", because "not to reveal himself and to be contented with his untouched glory would be a contradiction of himself."¹⁷² God is love and cannot be 'not-love' at the same time. Love is his essential nature, and therefore his being love is being faithful to his being himself. In this case, he has no choice of whether to be love or not-love. God's actualizing his love in his delivering up of his Son and his suffering points to his true divinity. Then, what is God's freedom? Moltmann's answer is that it is his decision to be true to his essence and "his *decision* is a *disclosure* of himself."¹⁷³ "Freedom arrives at its divine truth through love," Moltmann argues.¹⁷⁴

However uncomfortable Moltmann may feel about Barth's view, the more uncomfortable view is Moltmann's own concept of freedom of God. Moltmann appeals to the logic that God cannot be love and not-love at the same time. But his view makes God a kind of love-machine and betrays the Scriptures which ascribe various other emotions of God, including jealousy (Exod. 20:5, Deut. 4:24, 5:9, 6:15, Josh. 24:19, etc.) and wrath (1 Thess. 1:10, 2:16, Heb. 3:10, 15, etc.). Moreover, logically speaking, how can one talk about freedom of decision if his choice is only one? Moltmann seems

¹⁷²Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, p.53.

¹⁷³Ibid., p.54.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p.55.

excessively preoccupied with his social theology, and this leads him to hold a view of God's decision as being from all eternity to be identify himself with the world. In effect, this makes human existence an essential element in the constitution of God.

Despite these criticisms, a lesson Moltmann does give us is that "Christian faith cannot exist in some purely 'spiritual realm' unconcerned with and disconnected from real, concrete socio-political concerns."¹⁷⁵ Providing that some of the problematic features of his thought were resolved into a structure more consistent with the New Testament and traditional theological foundations, we should surely see a powerful and persuasive theology with enormous practicality. In particular, his claim for 'social personalism and personal socialism', which are based on the pattern of the life of the trinitarian God, might have a considerable impact on our life in modern society, extensively dominated as it is by two incompatible poles, that is, the ideals of individualism and collectivism.

Boff

Boff's trinitarian thought is an example of radical theology as well as an example of classical Liberation theology. As I noted earlier, Boff's trinitarian theology is more a theology of practice than of theory. In this sense, some agreement can be seen between his and Moltmann's approach. Boff's case, however, goes much further to the extent that in his treatment of the Trinity Boff actually expresses urgency for action.

¹⁷⁵N.Ormerod, *Introducing contemporary Theologies*, p.142.

His theology appears to have some positive factors, especially in stimulating our mind to re-capture the meaning of modern practical Christian life, but it looks too radical for many people and raises questions about the extent of its practicality. Firstly, his liberation thought, which it is meant to be practical, appears to be too ambiguous to put it into practice. Part of the reason is that he does not provide a detailed description of how to act and what to do in actual Christian life – especially in public life. The theoretical guideline is there but not only is the task it imposes too huge but, paradoxically, the practical detail is almost absent. However, we must remember he is writing as an author of theology, and not as an ecclesiastical politician or church leader.

Boff's theology in my view gives insufficient attention to experience. One important principle in Christianity on my view is the close relation between personal 'religious' experience and practice, and experience is always the motivation and impetus for practice. The impression is that, while Boff concentrates on practice, detail of personal Christian experience is almost absent. In his theology, Christian experience is always at a collective level – the society as a whole. He says that "we need to remake faith our experience of the Christian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit".¹⁷⁶ What is seen in this remark is an exhortation not as much to Christian individuals as to the church or the society as a whole. Notwithstanding the fact that Boff criticises any socio-political regime which limits individuality, his theology in fact focusses much more on a collectivist Christian movement than on individual Christian experience.

¹⁷⁶Boff, *op.cit.*, pp.111f.

The radical feature of his theology is also found, secondly, in his demand for a fundamental restructuring of Christian thought. Boff often mentions critically the misused 'pre-trinitarian' and 'a-trinitarian' theology in politics and ecclesiology. Nonetheless, his call for immediate action, either from the church or the public in general, suggests a kind of religiously motivated manipulation. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to tell how prominent a role the Church can actually exercise over the practical life of society as a whole, or how influential a religious movement such as implied by Boff can possibly be on the society as a whole. Although we will discuss this problem later, one point can be briefly made here. However sound Boff's call for a trinitarian reconstruction of thought and behaviour may be, his presentation of God as a liberating God needs cautious reception. Depicting God as 'liberating God' is no doubt the central Christian gospel. However, Boff's God has almost a military character. While including many other traditional attributions, Boff maintains an image of a revolutionary leader upturning the current political regime. To take a simple example, in his book the themes of the three chapters describing each Person of the Trinity are the Father as "origin and goal of all liberation", the Son as "mediator of integral liberation", and the Spirit as "driving force of integral liberation". Is the Christian God not a loving, embracing, and self-sacrificing God? If God is liberator, freeing the socially oppressed – in line with Boff's thought – is God the enemy of the human oppressor? Does he make war against his human subjects?

Whenever possible, though, Boff tries to remain in an orthodox Catholic position. One example would be his 'Seven propositions of Trinitarian orthodoxy' – a

summary of basic concepts, terms and understanding of the Trinity.¹⁷⁷ His views on these propositions seem to have no critical difference from the traditional Catholic position. One feature, however, in Boff's theology that stand out from the more traditional approaches – although not in fundamental contradiction to traditional theology – is his emphasis on social reflection of the pattern of the being of the Trinity. It is also clear that Boff's theology of social liberation is based on egalitarianism or individual equality. But from where does he derive this egalitarian principle from? The answer is the co-eternal existence of the three Persons. God is eternally three Persons in communion. On this point his view is basically not different from the traditional orthodox view. Nevertheless, in Boff's explanation of the Trinity, the 'begetting' and 'proceeding' process is entirely neglected; the result is the impression that 'God is ontologically three divine Persons, who only in obedience to their relational nature, not by their freedom, remain in communion.' There is thus a noticeable gap between Boff's and the Cappadocian conception of the trinitarian ontologies. For the Cappadocians the 'perichoresis' (of the Trinity) is the ontological subject; for Boff 'the three Persons' (in perichoresis) is the ontological subject. Moreover, in Boff neither the Son nor the Spirit derives his being from the Father in the immanent level; all Three were and are there from all eternity. From such a description of God, Boff's theology of the Trinity would make itself open to criticisms of tritheism.

One major reason for Boff's particular emphasis on the co-eternity of the Trinity seems to be to derive a model of perichoretic fellowship from the trinitarian

¹⁷⁷Ibid., pp.97-99.

communion so as to develop his egalitarian Liberation theology. Thus it follows that the Trinity's communion is the ideal norm for human social relationship. God's communion offers inspiration for how human relationship should be. The theological reason for finding a model from God is that 'human beings are made of the image and likeness of God'. Therefore, we must say that adopting a trinitarian model for human social life, as Boff does, is not necessarily a part of an imperative Christian gospel but merely a subjective and suggestive claim.

A close observation would immediately find that the Father's role in the economy is very meagre in comparison to those of the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit's role is a substantial one on the other hand. Boff describes the Spirit as having the subjective role for perichoresis in the divine communion.¹⁷⁸ In Boff's description, the role of the Father, in particular, is passive, receptive, and static; and largely symbolic and metaphoric. The most positive action of the Father seems to be the creation. Boff's repeated emphasis on the 'everything-is-triadic' principle between the three Persons becomes less convincing when Boff comes to explain the functions of each Person of the Trinity. This may suggest that his thought is mainly focussed on what God inspires us towards in the present concrete world, rather than, for example, what God's redemption means to us and how God can save our souls and prepare for our eschatological life. Accordingly, Boff's eschatological insight is highly limited and materialistic.

¹⁷⁸See *ibid.*, p.4f, 11, 13.

In Boff's theology, the economic Trinity is of little significance. The other authors in this study, such as Moltmann and LaCugna, tend to start with the economic Trinity to come to terms with the pattern of the immanent Trinity. In Boff's case, however, there is no difference between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. When he is speaking of the Trinity, what is in Boff's mind seems to be the immanent Trinity. Yet, in Boff, no difference is made whether it be the immanent or economic Trinity when we talk about the Trinity. In his sociological theology, the redemption of Jesus Christ is not decisively important. What is required for his Liberation theology is, firstly, the fact that God is three Persons in mutual perichoretic relations in love, secondly, the image of Jesus Christ as liberator, and thirdly, the uniting power of the Spirit. Beyond these three categories, no other dogmatic doctrines significantly influence the main thrust of Boff's Liberation theology. To put it in a more extreme expression, for Boff whether Jesus Christ's mission in the world was successful or not is not as important as the simple fact of his coming into the world. Again, Boff's immanent Trinity is already premised when talking about the economic Trinity. At first sight his view of the Trinity may seem to echo Rahner's famous axiom of the equation of the immanent and economic Trinity, but they are different. While Rahner gives equal considerations to both the two levels of the reality of God, the immanent and the economic Trinity, for Boff whether there is one or two realities of the Trinity is hardly of interest. The economic Trinity is largely ignored in Boff theology since, it appears, his immanent Trinity has already said all that needs saying about the economic Trinity.

To sum up, Boff endeavours to deliver a trinitarian theology that he believes is the most wanted and the most urgent in modern social and political life. His particular

concern for the third world situation has led him to bring God and the world into one converging purpose: liberation of the oppressed. Though maintaining the mainstream Catholic dogmatic position, his theology is more focussed on materiality – the common good of the human society, or “the preferential option for the poor”.¹⁷⁹ The result is the tendency to replace soteriology with a liberation theology that concerns itself more with the social-political aspects of the world. Since things like social equality and justice are the meaning of ‘liberation’ in the context of his thought, the being and life of the Trinity are sociologically and politically interpreted in the main. Assisted by the general trend of relational thought, his trinitarian theology offers an example of a radically developed social Trinity.

LaCugna

Compared to Boff’s radical approach, LaCugna’s is a more classical mainstream approach. LaCugna’s main interest may be represented in the two themes: firstly, the unity of the immanent and the economic Trinity, or in her terms, the unity of *theologia* and *oikonomia*,¹⁸⁰ and secondly, the concepts of God as personal, relational, and in communion.

LaCugna claims a split from the Western tradition of speculation on intradivine substance and of isolation of the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity. The inevitable reaction against the Arian partisan saw trinitarian theology concentrating on

¹⁷⁹Ormerod, op.cit., p.23.

¹⁸⁰It has been mentioned earlier that *theologia* and *oikonomia* are not exactly the same as the immanent and the economic Trinity. Nonetheless, they are largely equivalent.

the unity of the Father and the Son. This consequently made the Latin Fathers speculate on the intradivine ontology, God *in se*, in isolation from the economy of salvation. Not only did this result in dealing with God in separate treatises like *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*, but it also led to a tendency to treat various theological subjects like christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, soteriology in an unrelated way. Moreover, the excessive emphasis on the oneness of the being of God created the tendency to postulate that there was an impersonal substance underlying the Trinity. In this case, the personal nature of God disappears and at the same time the missions of Jesus Christ and the Spirit do not give proper significance to our concrete Christian life. On all these considerations, therefore, LaCugna believes that the trinitarian theology developed in the Western tradition should be heavily revised.

Here it is worth mentioning that for LaCugna this does not mean that the 'Greek' Fathers were totally free of responsibility for the way the church in general (the Eastern and the Western) had developed the ontology of God. LaCugna finds that in so far as the breach between the *oikonomia* and the *theologia* is concerned, the Cappadocians played a similar role. Although the Cappadocians maintained the connection between *oikonomia* and *theologia*, their stress on the coequality of the divine persons – as a conscious reaction against Arianism and Eunomianism – drew *theologia* somewhat different from the persons revealed in the economy.¹⁸¹ This is an indication that LaCugna does not accept all that was maintained by the Cappadocians. It means that

¹⁸¹LaCugna, *God For Us*, p.70-73.

the Cappadocians were right with their basic concepts but wrong in their application of them.

It must be said, however, that LaCugna's negative view of the Nicene as well as Cappadocians' contribution does not sufficiently value the enormously positive influence of their theology on the post-Nicene development of trinitarian theology.¹⁸² For example, it is none other than Nicea itself which linked the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity ontologically.¹⁸³ It was the Nicene conclusion that the Son, who is *homoousios* with the Father, and is thus "wholly" God as the Father is, is the same God who became man, suffered and died for us. LaCugna, however, does not sufficiently acknowledge this overall picture, but "runs aground on the rock of *homoousios*."¹⁸⁴

On the one hand, LaCugna's critical view of the Greek and Latin theologies, is generally legitimate. The Western and Eastern positions had left room for the possibility of separation between the economic and the immanent Trinity. On the other hand, however, one should not put too much blame on any particular theological enterprise, especially that of Augustine. We cannot single out one particular person or work as responsible for all the 'deviation' by which Western theology, in particular, has been characterised. Most of all it was the circumstance of the time which shaped the views of theologians like Augustine who did the best they could in the circumstances they

¹⁸²See, *ibid.*, pp. 53-73.

¹⁸³T.G.Weinandy, The Father's Spirit of Sonship, p.135f.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p.136.

faced. I acknowledge that this has already been implied by LaCugna, though not openly expressed. Today we do not have the same theological threats, such as Arianism, therefore the Latin trinitarian theology can be reshaped to suit the demand of contemporary Christianity.

LaCugna has suggested that the terms immanent and economic Trinity should be replaced by *theologia* and *oikonomia*.¹⁸⁵ It is a convincing complaint that the words 'immanence' and 'economy' can immediately make one suppose a dualistic ontology of God. In line with LaCugna, I believe that it is difficult for us to know God – considering the limitations of the human mind – by inquiring into either God *in se* or the economy of salvation, alone. Moreover, the term *oikonomia* has a more purposeful, dynamic, comprehensive and doctrinal implication than the English equivalent term 'economy' which carries with it a somewhat static, indifferent, and mechanical impression. In this sense, the language of *theologia* and *oikonomia* is less confusing and safer due to its conceptual neutrality. So far LaCugna's view has many positive points. Yet, what significant job do these terms do, which the terms the immanent and the economic Trinity do not, in establishing a trinitarian ontology? To be more specific, LaCugna insists that the 'unity' of *theologia* and *oikonomia* are essential in establishing a trinitarian ontology, but how do we unite them? If *theologia* itself is unknowable since it is characteristically a mystery, what significant difference does it make to concentrate on the *oikonomia* alone as opposed to working on *theologia* and *oikonomia* together as necessarily connected? The terms *oikonomia* and *theologia* are, no doubt, convenient in

¹⁸⁵LaCugna, *God For Us*, p.223.

some limited aspects. Nonetheless, the argument for their 'unity' seems to be no more than a polemical tool. It appears to me that LaCugna's emphasis is not essentially on the 'unity' but on anti-isolation of the immanent Trinity from salvation history.

Again, LaCugna's theology in which she explained the *theologia* and the *oikonomia* as inseparable but effectively distinguished realities of Christian ontology, gives an impression of a subordinationism on the part of the Son and the Spirit. In her approach, *theologia* is the realm of the Father and *oikonomia* the realm of the Son and the Spirit. To put it in a simpler language, LaCugna's statement that '*oikonomia* manifests the *theologia* and not vice versa' seems equivalent to the statement that 'the Son and the Spirit' manifest the Father'. There may be is no significant defect at this point, but the problem is that the Son and the Spirit never appear to reach and belong to the mysterious realm, the *theologia*. Consequently, the second and third persons are only instrumental and never properly ranked alongside the Father, the commissioner and programmer of the divine missions. Moreover, in LaCugna's approach, the missions of the Son and the Spirit do not reveal the Father at all because he is ineffable despite all the efforts of the Son and the Spirit. Let us take an example of how LaCugna deals with Jesus Christ:

God [the Father] as Unoriginate Origin is the Creator, the one who establishes everything that is in relation to God . . . Once the incomprehensibility of God is located in the mystery of God's personal existence, incomprehensibility is tied directly to the economy of redemption. Incomprehensibility is not a puzzle, not the ceiling of

human rational limitation, but the unfathomable mystery of a God who comes to us through Christ in the Spirit. The economy of salvation is thus as ineffable as the mystery of God.¹⁸⁶

As seen in these statements and elsewhere in LaCugna's work, the works of Jesus Christ and the Spirit never properly reveals the Father (or even God as the Trinity), since the Father is always in mystery. In this sense, the Son and the Spirit are merely delegates of God and do not represent themselves as God himself. The function of Jesus Christ is, according to LaCugna, to "disclose in his personal existence both what a human nature is and what a divine nature is".¹⁸⁷ But LaCugna's claim here does not concern how Jesus reveals the Father but how he links the divine realm to human realms – as "the communion of divine and human".¹⁸⁸ Consequently, the overall impression given by LaCugna's treatment of the Trinity is that there is a considerable distance ontologically and qualitatively from the Father to the Son and the Spirit – as if the Trinity is fully God, the Father is fully God, but the Son and the Spirit are not.

There are various causes which makes LaCugna appear to maintain a subordinate position of the Son and the Spirit to the Father. Firstly, while LaCugna stresses the Father as the 'Unbegotten Origin', the only source of all beings including the Son and the Spirit, mentions of the Son and the Spirit's taking an essential part, for

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p.303.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p.293.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., p.293ff.

example, in creation is lacking. Secondly, in LaCugna's approach there is no clear conceptual distinction between the way the Son and the Spirit are originated from God and the way human beings are originated from him. There is no doubt, of course, that she believes that the creation of human beings and the world is different from the divine begetting or breathing out: human beings and the world are bound by time and space and also made out of nothing, whereas the divine beings are always there as one God from all eternity. Nonetheless, LaCugna's exposition of the Trinity appears to stress the Father as the only 'unassisted' or 'uncooperated' source of all beings. In effect, therefore, for LaCugna there is no superior being to the Father, but there 'is' superior being to the Son and the Spirit. Thirdly, in LaCugna's trinitarian theology in general, the equality of the being of the Trinity is inadequate. Most of the dogmatic content of what LaCugna says is probably consistent with traditional patristic beliefs, but problems of wrong implication can persist in her treatments of the Son and the Spirit because of her overwhelming view that 'God in himself' is absolutely unknowable.

Thomas G. Weinandy¹ makes a similar criticism about LaCugna's treatment of the economy and immanent Trinity. He finds that LaCugna's *oikonomia* contains no real divine subjects. He agrees with LaCugna's view that there is no ontological difference between the economy and immanent Trinity. But "in order for there to be a God-for-us," he says, "there must be a God." Weinandy believes that "the *oikonomia* is the realm where God, in all his wholly otherness as God – ontologically distinct from the

oikonomia – is present and acts, and in the Incarnation actually abides, in the fullness of his wholly divine otherness, as man.”¹⁸⁹ However, for LaCugna,

God, in his wholly ontologically distinct otherness as God, actually never is present to nor acts within the *oikonomia*. Rather God is reduced to the *oikonomia* itself so that we no longer live with God in his wholly otherness, but only experience a God who has receded into and subsists wholly within the ontological level of the *oikonomia* itself.¹⁹⁰

Weinandy, therefore, argues that, despite her wish to remove the gap between God and us, LaCugna “has actually constructed a chasm between God and us that is now unbridgeable,” since we now only experience merely the “phenomenal God of the *oikonomia*” but not “the noumenal God”. One evidence which directs to this conclusion, according to Weinandy, is LaCugna’s conscious avoidance of the terms ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ in favour of the use of ‘God’, ‘Christ’, and ‘Spirit’; thereby to confine the *oikonomia* thoroughly as the Trinity-for-us.¹⁹¹ Weinandy’s criticism overlooks the other purposes of LaCugna’s treatment of the Trinity, in which she tries to link the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity, thereby to avoid speculation of the life of

¹⁸⁹Weinandy, op.cit., p.130.

¹⁹⁰Ibid..

¹⁹¹Ibid., p.132.

God *in se*. His criticism is nonetheless largely legitimate, since in LaCugna's thought, the economic reality never really makes proper contact with the immanent reality.

How far the transcendence of God, implied in her terms of mystery (*theologia*), succeeds, also remains a matter for consideration. Strictly speaking, LaCugna opposes the views of Barth and Rahner who speak of God as revealing himself as himself. Most of all, the fundamental ground for the rejection of their views is, again, the belief that we cannot know God fully as he is, we know about God partly and only as much as he is revealed in Christ and the Spirit – thus there is the mystery of God, which LaCugna designates by the term *theologia*. We cannot know God fully because human mentality is incapable of mastering the ontology of God. On this consideration, Barth's and Rahner's trinitarian doctrines are illegitimate.

To sum up, LaCugna's trinitarian theology parts from Latin theology, and is more consistent with the Greek ontological theology of the Cappadocians. She maintains that trinitarian theology in the West has for a long time deviated from its original line, as well as its original intention, in its attempt to defend the Christian faith from christological heresies. The consequence, she maintains, is that Christian life has been much deserted in speculative norms and realms with little practical inspiration. She insists that the remedy is to conceive the everlasting mystery of God on the basis of Christ's humanity in history and the concrete acts of the Spirit uniting us to God. Despite many sound points conveyed in LaCugna's theology, one may still feel left in uncertainty and unable to come to terms with God as 'Triune'.

Gunton

Let us now turn to Gunton's trinitarian thought. As was the case with LaCugna's theology, perhaps we can say that the core of Gunton's trinitarian theology is not its dogmatic contents and theological details, but rather its methodology and fundamental conception. Gunton feels that the traditional doctrine of God has been seriously deficient especially in modern days in providing practical guidelines for Christian life, and in answering atheistic and agnostic questions. He believes that the doctrine of the Trinity has the key to remedy all these problems, on the condition of its constant reshaping to meet modern needs.

The novelty of Gunton's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity lies here. In general terms, many theologians of the past were concentrating on the defence of traditional Christian doctrine from various forms of atheistic or heretical challenges. The case with Gunton is the same as these past theologians' in terms of the apologetic nature of his work, yet the difference is his call for a refurnishing of the tradition to meet modern conditions.

His theoretical approach may be characterised by the antithesis between Cappadocian and Augustinian theologies. He stresses that it was the doctrine of the Trinity, the form of which was completed by the Cappadocians, that should have been carried on in our Christian tradition, but Augustine and his followers radically deviated from this doctrine. The consequence was a highly impotent trinitarian theology which does very little for our modern Christian worship, life and thought. All sorts of modalism and authoritarianism as well as Christianity's confrontation of the modern atheistic attacks since the Enlightenment are all an Augustinian heritage.

One antithesis drawn by Gunton on the two types of theologies concerns the concept of person: psychological person (Augustine), versus social person (the Cappadocians). Gunton claims that it is the Cappadocian concept of person, rather than the monistic and static Augustinian concept, that is an ideal starting point for a modern reshaping of our traditional doctrine of the Trinity, while practically he sees the Western church's doctrine of God almost as obsolete in modern conditions. This signifies his general Eastern bias.

This does not mean, however, that he accepts all that was maintained in the Eastern church. Gunton feels that the Eastern theology also has problematic features like its Western counterpart, especially when an ontological subordinationism (ontological hierarchy or degree of deity in the Trinity) is suggested. He suspects that in the Eastern view of the Father as the fount of the Trinity, the Father could be interpreted as the subjective being underlying the being of the Trinity.

Here it is necessary to mention briefly Gunton's numeric sense of God's being. It is not too difficult to discern that for Gunton God is practically three unique Persons who are in perichoretic relationships; no one of the Three is ontologically dissolved into the other(s) nor is one ontologically superior or inferior to the others; and there is no underlying impersonal being that contains the Three. As is the case with Boff, a 'tritheistic' view (not necessarily tritheism) of the being of God is the result. However, we cannot make any other particular remarks beyond this, since Gunton does not say very much about the inner being of God.

The most distinctive feature of Gunton's trinitarian theology is the use of the concepts 'otherness' and 'relation'. He speaks of the being of God in terms of "what

Father, Son and Holy Spirit give to and receive from each other in the freedom of their unknowable eternity".¹⁹² In other words, God is three 'Persons' in communion. From this Gunton derives not only the personal nature of God but, more importantly, the concepts of otherness and relation. The concepts that are more frequently used than, and are equivalent to the 'otherness' and 'relation', are 'the immanent and the economic Trinity'. In general, the latter words are used to distinguish between, for example, 'God as he is in himself' and 'God who is for us'; whereas Gunton, by using the terms otherness and relation, is more concerned to express, firstly, the three unique Persons and their relation within the divine realm, and God's relation to what is not God, that is, human beings. Strictly speaking, the connection between 'otherness and relation' and 'the immanence and the economy' is not as obvious as Gunton thinks. In any case, Gunton goes on to say that otherness and relation are not isolated from each other. Otherness is the condition for relation, and relation is the condition for otherness. He thus suggests the use of the concept 'otherness in relation' rather than the use of them separately.

If the concepts of the relation and otherness are considered as associated with the concepts of the immanent and the economic Trinity at all, a natural question that can be raised is how he conceives about the relation between the economic and immanent Trinity, or more concretely, how he thinks about Rahner's axiom of the equation of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity. The most probable answer would be that he does not accept Rahner's axiom since he firmly stresses the unknowability of God. Because there is no way for us to know about the reality of the life in the Godhead, we

¹⁹²Cf., Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p.196.

do not know how much the economic Trinity reflects the immanent Trinity either. According to Gunton, we know God only relationally, but not substantially.

The value of the term otherness in relation becomes more clear when it is applied to the relation between God and the world (or the human being). Gunton asserts that the ontology of the Trinity essentially throws light on our understanding of our own being and of our own world – obviously through the concept of otherness in relation.¹⁹³ He is confident that by the principle of otherness in relation answers can be given to all modern questions about the connection between the ontology of God and the world. To do justice to his theoretical adventure, he keeps on saying that trinitarian theology must be open to conceptual possibilities, but he fails to provide any clear criteria for what is acceptable and what is not.

Although in most parts of his argument in this connection there may be some justifiable logic, one is still left with the impression that Gunton's application of the concepts of otherness and relation is somewhat abusive of language. It is of course true that the humankind is the 'other' to God because it is not God. However, Gunton's argument has a rather awkward element when he appears to say that we must be related to God because we are not God. Likewise, human beings, we are told, should have perichoretic relation with the world (the rest of the creatures) because it is not human beings. Similarly, a person ought to have mutual interaction with other persons. To do justice to Gunton's conceptions of otherness and relation, they have to be used in a combined term of 'otherness in relation' – which Gunton actually stresses – yet such

¹⁹³Cf. *ibid.*, Preface to the first edition, p. xi.

logic has to be used in strictly confined conditions, for example, as an auxiliary tool. It seems too much to apply the principle to everything.

Similarly, the statement that “the church is therefore called to be a being of persons-in-relation which receives its character as communion by virtue of its relation to God, and so is enabled to reflect something of that being in the world,”¹⁹⁴ is theoretically manipulative. What is said in this statement is that since the church is ‘related’ to God, it should receive the character of God’s being. But is it simply the ‘relation’ that determines the communal character of the church? If there is one that is related to another, should one of them follow the character of the other? If God is related to us then can we also say that God must receive our character? Logical necessity, as is the case with Gunton, is not enough to explain our modelling God’s character. Gunton’s argument could have been more convincing if he appealed to, for example, Jesus’ prayer for the church: “. . . I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one . . .” (John 17). In this biblical account, for the church to be ‘one’ as God *is* suggests a kind of forthcoming divine-human effort to fulfil it. Obviously, it does not imply any logical necessity, such as Gunton appears to rely on in his case; what is envisaged in the biblical saying is something which God and human beings are to build up in co-operation. What determines the character of the church is not the mere fact that the church is ‘related’ (by the principle of otherness in relation) to God but it is the consequent outcome of the co-work of the Spirit and the Christian community. In Moltmann and Boff, there is a more generally acceptable logic as they maintain that since the human being is made in the

¹⁹⁴Ibid., p.12.

image and likeness of God, the church, human society and interpersonal relationships should follow something that resembles the way God is. This kind of logic is totally lacking in Gunton.

In this sense, one may say, Gunton seems to be trying to fit everything into his already-made principle. Admittedly, he clearly states that it is a trinitarian 'implication'. 'Implication', however, is an extremely dangerous word in Christian theology. Implicated ideas can often unconsciously manipulate fundamental differences. It is clear from the history of the trinitarian doctrine that, while implication had an important part in the formation of the doctrine, it also played a crucial role in developing heretical ideas about the being of God. Implication must be strictly controlled by the criteria given from more fundamental doctrines that are visibly justified by Scripture. In regard to this issue, I should remark that Gunton's principle of otherness in relation itself hardly receives any direct biblical support.

It is also worth commenting that there is an extensive use of metaphysical philosophy in Gunton's treatment of trinitarian theology. It seems that he strongly feels that for the Christian faith to be a convincing force to modern minds it has to be equipped with sufficient conceptual logic that can be confirmed by philosophy, even though he insists that his position is only tenable because it is biblically grounded. In other words, he tries to find a 'truth' that can be accessed either by theology or by philosophy. Such a concern for philosophy is also found in Moltmann, though his is a negative concern. The difference between the two theologians is that while Gunton, seemingly, searches for a philosophical counterpart to make his theological objects persuasive, Moltmann sees philosophical methodology as, practically, unusable for

theological studies. The relation between theology and philosophy is not our major concern in this study, but it must be remarked that Christianity is a religion of God's revelation and of his mystery; no explication of Christian truth is possible apart from firm dependence upon God's revelation. Philosophical metaphysics is more often than not an additional burden to theology rather than necessarily a help.

If Gunton is largely adventurous and imaginative (in a neutral, not negative, sense), he is also to a considerable extent existential. For instance, he hardly makes any attempt to describe the inner divine life – this is consistent with his emphasis on the unknowability of God. He also opens his mind for conceptual clues and possibilities to all areas of the human as well as natural sciences. One particular example is his claim that natural science is not an enemy of Christianity; he sees that recent scientific discoveries, especially 'relativity' theory, are indicating some truth of Christian reality applicable to the world. Here again, however, this raises vexatious questions of how far the Christian faith should be shaped by current fashions in science.

Gunton's tendency to borrow reasoning from ideas of natural and human science requires careful thought, since it seems to suggest that faith is amendable to reason. Although such a tendency is also found in Aquinas and much of scholastic traditions, testimonies of Christian faith elsewhere tell us a difference story. Thus, for example, Tertullian followed by Barth says that 'because it is absurd, I believe!', and a writer rightly argues that

If we require that faith be reasonable, does this not determine the outcome of our theology before we even start? . . . If we allow our prior determination of what is

or is not reasonable to evaluate our faith, then why bring faith in at all? Why not just speak of 'reason seeking understanding' [rather than 'faith seeking understanding' (St Anselm)] and call it philosophy?¹⁹⁵

Reasoning, of course, is not necessarily an enemy to faith. Yet, it must also be remembered that much of Christian faith can never be verified by human reasoning alone. Faith is concerned with more than mere intellectual understanding and sheer logic; it also belongs to a mysterious realm inasmuch as divine reality is mysterious to our human mental capacity. Thus it is why David Brown suggests that the existence of God needs to be verified by personal experience of God and, further, even by accepting claims made on the basis of experience of God by others.¹⁹⁶ This is in a way also in line with what Schleiermacher had to say about self-consciousness as access to truth.¹⁹⁷ The fact is that Christian faith has elements that do not seem inherently to belong to the human world. Gunton's approach to natural and human science sometimes suggests too much conformity to human reason.

As a conclusion, the novelty of Gunton's trinitarian thought is that 'everything looks different in the light of the Trinity'.¹⁹⁸ He emphasises that the ontology of God - who is in "what Father, Son and Holy Spirit give to and receive from each other in the

¹⁹⁵Ormerod, *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹⁹⁶D.Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, p.35.

¹⁹⁷F.Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*.

¹⁹⁸Cf., Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p.28.

freedom of their unknowable eternity"¹⁹⁹ – throws lights on our understanding of our being and the world. This is precisely where Gunton's contribution to contemporary trinitarian thought is found. His claim that trinitarian theology should be reshaped to meet modern conditions should be highly commended, firstly, for the sake of the evangelical task of the modern church, and secondly, for boosting confidence in Christian theology in confrontation with modern atheism. Equally important, however, is that the tendency shown in Gunton's over-openness in theological methodology must be cautiously treated – in order not to dilute the core of the Christian gospel.

So far we have examined the trinitarian thought of the four theologians. As a conclusion for the present stage of this study, a few remarks can be made. First, all four theologians believe that modern Christian theology needs internal refurbishing to meet modern conditions. Second, they claim that the doctrine of God must be redefined by social-trinitarian consideration. Third, they insist that Christian dogmatics must be practically applicable in concrete Christian life, and that this requires a theological insight for the outward, relational, and personal character of the triune God. From these points, we may conclude that trinitarian theology today is developing in a largely agreed direction and that contemporary thought on the Trinity is departing from the way the doctrine of the Trinity was conceived in the past.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., p.,196.

CHAPTER III

An analysis of the main changes and direction in recent trinitarian thought

In the foregoing discussions, we have seen how the doctrine of the Trinity is conceived in contemporary theology by examining some of the thoughts of four writers who have been amongst the most influential trinitarian theologians in the last three decades. We have also attempted to characterise the four theologians' doctrinal positions by analysing their views and tendencies in some detail. During these previous discussions, I believe, enough indications have been given about the way in which modern trinitarian theology is directed. It was seen that the four theologians are largely in agreement in the way in which they conceive the doctrine of the Trinity. Now is the time to articulate the implications. In this chapter, I will try to clarify what changes of direction have been taking place in recent trinitarian theology. I propose to discuss the changes under the following categories.

1. From oneness to threeness in the concept of the triune God.
2. From psychological to sociological constitution of the person.
3. From transcendence to immanence of God.
4. From the immanent (essential) being to the economic Trinity.
5. From epistemology to experiential realities.

6. From Western to Eastern theology
7. From dogmatic details to fundamental concepts
8. From formal and metaphysical to practical and existential approach.
9. From defence of the tradition to internal refurbishing.
10. From exclusivism to reconciliation.
11. From preservation of tradition to ecumenism.
12. From a masculine to a bi-sexual or trans-sexual God.
13. From evangelism to liberation theology.

Firstly, amongst the most notable changes in the trinitarian theology of the last thirty years or so is the change from 'oneness' to 'threeness' in the concept of God, from a monistic to a triadic concept of God, or the 'Unity Model' to the 'Plurality Model'²⁰⁰. All the four authors we have examined stress that the starting point of trinitarian theology is the notion that God is three Persons in perichoretic union. The anti-Nicene church started their formation of the being of God with the question of the relation of Jesus to God, a mathematical question: how can the apparently human person Jesus be one with God (the Father)? Before they reached their dogmatic conclusion, what the early Fathers started with was the two apparently distinguished Persons described in the scriptures. It is precisely from this insight that Gunton, in particular, firmly rejects the Augustinian view in which God is perceived fundamentally as one substance. But before one sets off on a criticism of Augustine and his followers, one must consider some historical facts. One of these is that it was specific circumstances that inevitably drove

²⁰⁰See Brown, *The Divine Trinity*.

the Nicene Fathers – in their conscious reaction against the Arian heresies – to depict the Trinity more in terms of oneness than threeness and in terms of unitedness than distinctiveness. Given this fact, it is not surprising that the being of God could sometimes be understood as constituted in one consciousness especially in the light of the later Cartesian definition of ‘being’ as a centre of individual consciousness. The more fashionable insight in contemporary theology is to see the Father, the Son and the Spirit as three distinctive persons, just as the New Testament testifies the being of God as such. The new rising interest of contemporary trinitarian theology is much more in demonstrating how the three Persons are one God, than in speculating a triple constitution of one God. Such a tendency is most apparent in the sensitive reaction against modalism, especially against the views of both Barth’s ‘lordship’ of the triune God and Rahner’s ‘threefold’ self-revelation of God. Neither of these views receives much sympathy from most theologians today, because they are seen as a form of monotheism. This, on the other hand, suggests a kind of tritheistic tendency in modern trinitarianism. The contemporary doctrine of the Trinity is no doubt ‘tritheistic’, but it is difficult to say that it is tritheism if we consider the gravity of the repeated emphasis on the perichoresis of the Trinity. One thing that matters in today’s trinitarian theology is that monotheistic views of God or monistic understandings of the relationships between Father, Son and Spirit are entirely rejected. In any case, the conclusion here is that the tendency preserved in the Christian tradition (especially in the West) which puts emphasis on ‘one substance’ of God rather than the distinctiveness of three persons or sees God as constituted merely as ‘relation’ between Father Son and Spirit has now been replaced by the tendency to explain God as fundamentally three distinctive Persons

but in communion. Oneness and threeness may seem to be the different sides of a coin, but, as has already been seen in the history of the theocratic Christendom for example, the implications can lead to significant consequences.

Secondly, the change from the pre-Moltmann monistic to the triadic understanding of the Trinity of recent years can also be described as the change from psychological to sociological views of the constitution of the Trinity. Augustine was much more concerned with the inner life of the Trinity in the Godhead than the God who is manifested in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in salvation history. Augustine, Gunton maintained, contemplated God in isolation from the human sphere due to his platonic anti-materialism, and the result was that Western theology, which followed the teachings of Augustine and Aquinas, has preserved the tendency to speculate on the inner divine reality in separation from salvation history. If God is conceived in such a way, the distinction between Father, Son and Spirit is likely to become meaningless, because whichever person of the Trinity is met by human beings he must be merely God rather than the Father, the Son or the Spirit. The tendency of inner trinitarian speculation becomes more problematic if Boethius and Descartes' understanding of existence as individual centre of consciousness – namely the concept of 'one being one consciousness' – is applied to the being of God. Augustine had already opted for a monotheistic view and set out to explain God in terms of one consciousness. The consequence was his analogy of the Godhead with the human mind. Augustine was concerned about the biblical declaration of humanity being in 'the image of God'. If man is made in the image and likeness of God, there must be some trace of God left in man, and Augustine concluded that it was the human mind. Thus he saw human mind as

mirroring the being of God. In this Augustine did not mean to claim that the constitutional structure of the human mind is identical with that of God. What he intended was simply to help understand God and for Augustine it was the human mind amongst all beings in the world that can provide the closest analogy to the being of God. Whatever was his intention, the irreversible heritage of Augustine left in Western Christianity was the tendency to envisage God's being in terms of human personhood.

The currently dominating trend follows Cappadocian understanding of the ontology of God and sees God as in a social constitution. It is obvious that if God is not a mere single subject but the union of three unique beings, we are bound to focus on the sociality of the Trinity rather than on inner psychological divisions in the Godhead. That is why the doctrine of perichoresis is frequently stressed in recent trinitarian theology. In fact, the concept of sociality was not totally absent in Augustine's view as the doctrine of the perichoresis was an important part in his trinitarianism. But the problem that recent critics of Augustinian tradition point out is that the Trinity's personal characteristics, by which as Father, Son, and the Spirit are clearly distinguished, are lacking in Augustine and Aquinas, since in that tradition the Persons in the Godhead are simply relations rather than persons.²⁰¹ Even though the concept of perichoresis was also maintained in Augustinian tradition, it seems that the concept would not play a crucial role so long as God was understood monodically. The trinitarian theology today speaks of God in a social relationship of the unique Father, the unique Son and the unique Spirit.

²⁰¹Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, Ia.28, 2c.

Thirdly, the trinitarian theology today also talks more about the immanence of God than the transcendence of God, and thus there is the conceptual change from inwardness to outwardness in the Trinity. God is no more an unreachable sovereignty as he was seen as such in the Old Testament and claimed by the so-called Neo-Orthodoxy theology represented by Karl Barth. The post-Nicene church was maintained in the vertical, hierarchical, authoritarian, regime inspired by the principle of Ignatius of Antioch: one God—one Christ—one bishop—one church. Although this regime had the advantage of uniting the church, it also contributed in distancing God from the human world. In such an ecclesiastic system, there is no direct access of men and women to God: there is a considerable gap between God and the ordinary believer. However, the New Testament depicts a God who approaches human beings, who gives himself to them, and who abides with and in them. God is not a being who is totally isolated from the human sphere. On the contrary, he invites men and women to join in the divinity of God. God is not a self-contained divine being; his presence is manifested in this concrete world, in the life of the believer. On this view, Karl Barth's claim of God as 'wholly other' is unappealing to contemporary trinitarian theology. By such a claim Barth meant to oppose what we may call the human-centred theology of his time, in favour of a God-centred theology. Barth had a point, especially when it is remembered that there had been in the theology of his time a dominating tendency to explain God by means of a fully human rationality, thereby violating divine freedom. Thus Barth concept of God as 'Lord' pushed God towards a more transcendental sphere. Therefore, in Barthian theology, it is claimed, the Trinity remained as an authoritarian God, because he was essentially a lord rather than Father or friend. Moreover, the distinctions between the

Father, the Son and the Spirit were not clearly perceived because they were distinguished from one another only as different modes of the same God.²⁰² Therefore Barth's Triunity, if compared to the general trends of the trinitarian doctrine of God today, is seen as too transcendental. It is true that recent trinitarian theologians also speaks of the transcendental, inaccessible character of the being of God, as seen, for instance, in the discussion of LaCugna and Gunton. LaCugna talks about the ineffable mystery of God and Gunton the unknowability of God. Nevertheless, in recent trinitarian theology, in comparison to the doctrine of God in the past, that attention has shifted largely from the transcendence to the immanence of God.

This shift is perhaps most clearly exemplified by the contrasting attitudes of Barth and Moltmann's theology on God's relation to the world. For Barth God is antecedently in himself what he is in revelation. In other words, God is self-sufficient and has no constraint of need; without us he has his life from himself, and is already what he is in revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²⁰³ On the other hand, Moltmann's view of God is more like a Process theology; the nature of God as a loving and suffering God is not fully actualised without experiencing the human being and the world and until the eschatological consummation. Moltmann's view is, to an extent, in line with LaCugna's concept of the God's relation to the world. Whatever the validation of their theology, the point we are concerned with here is that, unlike Barth's theology, recent

²⁰²Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, p.359.

²⁰³Ibid., I/1, p.479; II/1, p.257.

trinitarian theology perceives God essentially in connection with his immanence in this world.

This discussion of the transcendence and immanence of God inevitably leads us to our fourth point, the shift of attention from immanent to economic Trinity. The Western tradition in general has conceived God *in se* often in isolation from the economic Trinity. Many medieval theologians produced two separate treatises on the doctrine of God – on the one God, and on the Trinity, and this tradition was continued until the recent past, especially, in Schleiermacher who put the doctrine of the Trinity as an appendix at the end of his book The Christian Faith. For them and many others in Christian tradition God as he is in himself and God as Trinity manifested in salvation history were considered as separate issues – even if they were understood as essentially connected. This can mean a tradition which is more focussed on the immanent Trinity than the economic Trinity – as if the former expresses truer God than the latter. Augustine's platonic assumption of idealism distanced God from human life, holding that God was knowable only analogically and through the mind of the self. This tendency to see God in separation from the salvation history was expressed in the most outrageous terms by Kant, who said that whether God was three or ten it would not make any difference to human life.²⁰⁴

When compared to this general milieu of Western theology, it can be said that trinitarian theology today concentrates more on the economic Trinity. Scholars such as R.P.C. Hanson points out possible connection between this recent tendency and the

²⁰⁴Immanuel Kant, Der Streit der Fakultäten, PhB 252, p.34f, quoted in Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, p.6.

emergence of biblical criticism, which offers a purely historical reading of Scripture.²⁰⁵ Whatever the relevance may be, recent trinitarian theology sees the economic Trinity as the only access to the knowledge of God as he is in himself. The logic is that there is no way of knowing God except through the works of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit since God's inner life is impenetratable by mere human rationality. Moreover, if the immanent Trinity is not actualised in the economic Trinity, it is impossible for us to conceive the relation of God to the world.²⁰⁶ The difficulty remains as to whether we can perceive God's inner being and life at all, even though we do perceive the God who is revealed in the works of Jesus and the Spirit. The general use of the term 'immanent Trinity' itself has carried the implication that some sort of conceptual portrayal of the inner being and life of God is possible. It is a dominant trend today to refrain from drawing any definite conclusion about the 'inner life of God'. LaCugna, in particular, argues that the terms immanent Trinity and economic Trinity must be replaced by '*theologia*' and '*oikonomia*'. She maintains that the existence of the former terms themselves suggest the existence of two different genuine realities of God. Her point here is the replacement of definite ontological terms with phenomenal, descriptive, and more intelligible, terms: we know God fully as God who is for us in the salvation history and from this we also understand what God will be in himself, but God *in se* cannot be put into human terms. Even without necessarily adopting LaCugna's terms *theologia* and *oikonomia*, we find that

²⁰⁵R.P.C.Hanson, The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God, p.825.

²⁰⁶C.Schwöbel, "The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks", in Trinitarian Theology Today, ed. C.Schwöbel, p.6f.

recent trinitarian theology in general maintains the Trinity in salvation history as its starting point. In this sense, the more traditional approach of having the immanent Trinity as the starting and primary point in explicating the divine nature is now being replaced by the new interest in the economic Trinity as the prerequisite to explain God. This replacement, however, does not mean an omission of the term and concept of the immanent Trinity, but it entails the treatment of the immanent Trinity only as a counterpart of the economic Trinity.

Fifthly, one aspect of the change in trinitarian theology today from earlier theology is the shift of the interest from an epistemological or metaphysical understanding of God, to focus on the experiential reality of God. As discussed above, the trinitarian theology of the past was relatively more concerned with the immanent Trinity than the economic. The consequence was that God was seen as a highly remote person from the human sphere, and there was a gulf between God and the world. In this situation the explanation of the existence of God itself was already a difficult task for theology; the main theological questions would be concerned with how to explain the existence of God and how the remote God could be perceived – rather than how God was related to our own life.

Similarly, that the doctrine of God in the past was dealt with largely in epistemological and metaphysical philosophical dimensions is well illustrated by James B. Torrance's criticism of the traditional pattern of theological education.²⁰⁷ He says that traditionally in theological colleges and seminaries, no Christian doctrine was taught in

²⁰⁷James B. Torrance, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in our contemporary Situation,' in The British Council of Churches, *The Forgotten Trinity*, vol.3, pp.12-14.

the first year but the philosophy of religion. This meant that students started theology by considering such themes as the existence of God or the verification of religious language. It is only after this, in the second year, they were taught about the Christian doctrines. Consequently, "The possibility of belief precedes the actuality," and doctrines such as on the Incarnation and the Trinity were to be "grafted on to" a previously established metaphysical foundation. The eventual result of such a theological education system is, he argues, reflected in the western tradition in that "trinitarian thinking is controlled by or subordinated to a prior 'monotheistic' or unitarian concept of God." Torrance, therefore, proposes that the reverse order of teaching must be applied in theological education, that is, beginning with the New Testament followed by philosophical questions about belief. What is implied in his argument may over-simplify the character of the theology of the past, but it would make sense if we consider the facts, for example, that Augustine sought for the analogy of God in the human mind and that for Schleiermacher the doctrine of the Trinity was only a secondary doctrine. Today, as seen from Torrance's observation and as is also reasonably clear in the views of the four theologians we examine, recent trinitarian theologians are prepared to talk about God much more at an existential level, that is, in consideration of God's salvation history than in the level of epistemological metaphysics. God is no longer perceived as existing in metaphysical realm but his being is in reality and concretely perceptible in our experience.

This new tendency can be described as a movement towards Eastern trinitarian concepts and away from those of the West, and here is our sixth aspect of change. Trinitarian theologians today see the social concept of the Cappadocian ontology of the

triune God as the prime starting point for establishing modern trinitarian theology. It was the Cappadocian Fathers by whom the true expression of the being of God was first achieved. Augustine, Aquinas, and their descendants deprived the Trinity of its social and outward character, by depicting the personhood of the Trinity simply as relation, that is, love, thereby leading to an abstract substance-metaphysical God. The result of their influence was that the Trinity was often understood monistically and modalistically, and the Trinitarian Doxology would be cited only symbolically and as a matter of formality in Christian rituals. Moreover, the doctrine of the Filioque is also seen as problematic today. The doctrine has been criticised by Orthodox theologians who maintain that not only does it impair the triadic balance of the relationships between the trinitarian Persons and makes the Spirit ontologically a subordinate Person to the other Persons but it also jeopardises the personhood of the Holy Spirit. One thing that is said to be a weakness in western theology is the lack of adequate development of the doctrine of the Spirit, while Christology has been relatively overemphasised. The result is that "the Spirit sometimes appears to be little more than an appendage of Christ" while he is seen as less than a distinct divine person, thus as less than God.²⁰⁸

All this does not mean that the Eastern position is absolutely ideal. Theologians today do also point out weaknesses in the Eastern theology of the Trinity. One example is its tendency to make the Father appear superior to the other Persons by stressing the generic priority of the Father. Here is the danger of subordinationism of the Son and the Spirit to the Father, on the one hand, and it can in its own way also lead to a modalistic

²⁰⁸BCC, *The Forgotten Trinity*, vol.1, p.31.

view of the Trinity. However, the Filioque controversy is not a major problem since it can relatively easily be solved by adjusting part of the credal texts. The real problem is the monistic and static idea of the triune God that is deeply rooted in the Western thought. Today theologians of the West are largely sympathetic to the Eastern view of the social-perichoretic Trinity, and attempt to restate the Western theology by adopting the Eastern concept.²⁰⁹ In this sense, we can say that trinitarian theology today is moving towards the East.

Seventhly, in view of the foregoing discussion, we can also say that contemporary trinitarian theology is concerned more with fundamental concepts than with dogmatic details. Theologians today feel the necessity of a major amendment of traditional trinitarian thought. They insist that this can be done by re-conceiving more basic concepts of the being of the Trinity, notably the concept of 'person'. They feel that it is not a very effective argument today just to say that, for example, God is outward, loving, and relational because it is what God is, while actually conceiving of a static, enclosed Trinity. Such an argument is increasingly losing ground in the modern world. Rather, they opt for the concept that a person intrinsically denotes a relational character, so if the subject of God is personal he must be relational in nature. They would also say that God is the Supreme Person, the ideal model for human persons to follow. They would further like to say that if God is relational, then the Trinity has to

²⁰⁹Schwöbel's comments: "The ecumenical encounter with Eastern Orthodoxy brought Western trinitarians therefore from the question of the *filioque* into the heart of Eastern trinitarianism shaped by the seminal insights of the Cappadocians concerning the ontology of personhood." C. Schwöbel, 'The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks', in Trinitarian Theology Today, ed. C. Schwöbel, p.4.



be the ultimate criterion for human social relationship. Considering all this, one increasingly agreed thought is that dogmatic theology must no longer exist in total isolation from general human science: theological beliefs have to be confirmed and reinforced by general empirical reflection. For this reason, trinitarian theology today is more concerned with fundamental concepts regarding the being of God rather than with lingering over the existing tradition for minor amendments.

This brings us to our eighth aspect of change in contemporary trinitarian theology: the change from formal to existential approaches.²¹⁰ Today's theologians are apparently keen on providing existential answers to the questions that can be raised by those outside the church. Christianity is not merely about formal rituals and preservation of traditions; Christian life is the reality of the Christian community and especially the individual believer. Neither the community nor the individual believer must be left to be content with mere ritual forms and traditions if they are no more than symbolic and metaphorical and have no direct connection with the concrete world. Theological doctrines and principles by which the meaning of those rituals and formal traditions are explained have to be sustained by verifiable 'facts' and 'logics'. The Enlightenment in particular showed the Christian church that Christian beliefs that are not verified in human terms are likely to be misconceived and misinterpreted. These appear to be the things with which modern theologians are deeply concerned. In LaCugna and Gunton, as we have seen, we find a typical example of theologians who opt to take an existential

²¹⁰This change of thought is implied by Gunton's remarks: "The Trinity has more often been presented as a dogma to be believed rather than as the living focus of like and thought." Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p.3.

approach. They do not attempt to explicate, for instance, God's inner life, because whatever is said of it, it cannot be verified. Similarly, they do not suggest that the economic Trinity is the same as the immanent Trinity because whatever conclusion is derived from the economic Trinity, there is no way of knowing whether it is identical with or different from the immanent Trinity since the reality of the latter is unknowable and cannot be tested.

Ninthly, in today's trinitarian theology there is the change of attitude from defence of the tradition to internal refurbishing.²¹¹ In view of the four theologians we have examined, it appears that trinitarian theologians today are not obstinately defensive of tradition but are more open to the opinions of those outside the church and more perceptive and responsive to changes in general thought. Of course, in the past there have been writers who wished to see Christian theology to be more compatible with the general view of the world. Nevertheless, we found in Gunton, in particular, a repeated demand for a change of attitude in trinitarian theology towards an openness of conceptual possibilities. Theologians today believe in the necessity of re-conceiving and re-stating traditional trinitarian doctrines. For them, persisting in the tradition as it has been inherited is anachronistic, for traditional concepts of the Trinity need to be re-examined and updated so that they can be meaningful to modern minds in modern situations.

²¹¹Cf. "Feminists, liberationists, process thinkers, and more traditionalist Catholic and Protestant theologians as well as eastern Orthodox desire to free the Trinity from isolation in traditional statements with the consequent lack of relation to practical Christian faith and life." Thomson, *op.cit.*, p.3.

"[V]irtually every serious theological movement of recent years has sought in its own terms to state and shape trinitarian doctrine." Feenstra & Plantinga, *op.cit.*, p.3.

Tenthly, contemporary trinitarian writers maintain that in order for the doctrine of the Trinity to have convincing power in modern conditions, theologians of the West and the East must find a way to be reconciled theologically to each other by establishing a dogmatic theology that can be agreeable to both Eastern and Western churches. The task of trinitarian theology is not confined to providing existential answers to atheistic questions that challenge the traditional Christian beliefs in God. For the theology of the triune God to be apologetically effective in defence against external challenges, the church must be united in thought. The differences in the doctrine of the Trinity between the East and the West already make Christian faith appear to be unreliable – since at least one of the two, either the Eastern or the Western doctrine, must be wrong where they are not in agreement. The theological contention between the two will destroy the credibility of the Christian religion.

We learn from history that, as far as theology is concerned, the doctrine of the Filioque was largely responsible for the separation between the Eastern and Western churches. Moltmann, Boff and Gunton mention the urgent necessity of an amendment of the Filioque clause – either by inserting more words in the credal text to clarify the meaning or by simply omitting the clause from the text. One practical solution suggested by modern theologians, whether or not the Filioque clause is kept, is to establish a commonly agreed interpretation of the controversial part of the creed, in the form of official statements. Certainly the starting point of reconciliation should be the Filioque clause in as much as it was there where East and West departed from each other. How far, though, the settlement of the Filioque controversy would unite the East and the East in other theological areas is difficult for us to prophesy. In any case, the important fact

is that contemporary trinitarian theologians are deeply concerned to find a way of reconciliation or compromise between the East and West rather than persisting in exclusivism.

A similar attempt of reconciliation is also being made between theology and science (both human and natural sciences) in recent trinitarian theology. Traditionally, science was regarded as an enemy to theology. Many theologians in recent years claim that science does not necessarily impair Christian faith and beliefs. As seen earlier, Gunton attempts to assert that humanity as well as the natural sciences do reinforce certain areas of Christian beliefs. For example, the relativity theory of modern physics testifies to the relational character of the universe, thus suggesting some truth about God's trinitarian, relative, programming and administration of the world. Gunton's open mind towards natural science is not clearly reflected by the other three writers we have examined. Yet it is not too difficult to perceive, in the thought of the other three, the kind of attitude which would not senselessly reject science. Their existential frame of mind encourages them not to resist science but consider where it can support Christian theology.

Eleventhly, recent trinitarian theology is developing in an ecumenical direction rather than concentrating on the preservation of tradition. We have already noted the Filioque, but here we also need to see the recent trends in the wider ecumenical sphere. Denominational barriers hardly dictates their treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, even where some bias of particular traditions may seem to exist. One noticeable movement in recent trinitarian theology is some international and interdenominational conferences and studies held under the theme of trinitarian theology and the consequent

publications. These include the Study Commission of the British Council of Churches and Conference of European Churches, and their publications of The Forgotten Trinity in three volumes and a series of Occasional Papers respectively. In the case of the BCC Study Commission, one of its main conclusions is that

Ecumenically, we believe that the doctrine of the Trinity has much to contribute to the process in which the divided churches of Christendom are drawing near to one another.²¹²

This is echoed by the title of the essay collection of The Reconciling Power of the Trinity and one of the central themes of the CEC: "unity in diversity, or *communio* and independence"²¹³, the model of which is found in the Trinity, and by which dogmatic differences can be overcome. Under this principle, G. Larentzakis stresses, "The theological, ecumenical dialogue must still be regarded, even today, as significant and necessary."²¹⁴ In these examples and many others, it is clear that recent theologians on the whole are increasingly feeling the necessity and the possibility of fruitful ecumenical movements.

Here two points may be made. The first is the fact that our belief about what God is, that is, the doctrine of the Trinity, is a much more accepted doctrine than almost

²¹²BCC, op.cit., vol.1, p.43.

²¹³G.Larentzakis, 'First Comment on Prof. Moltmann's Speech', in The Reconciling Power of the Trinity, CEC Occasional Paper, No.15, p.65.

²¹⁴Ibid..

any other doctrine.²¹⁵ In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity, compared to other doctrines, has led to less denominational divisions and differences of tradition. Eucharistic and baptismal doctrines, for example, have caused serious debate and divisions within the church. In the case of eucharist, there are different opinions such as Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, and Memorialism, while the different understandings of baptism have caused denominational divisions over adult and infant baptisms, and baptisms by affusion and by immersion. To a much lesser extent this is also true of the doctrine of the Trinity – if we take into account the Eastern and Western divisions and the Unitarian tradition, for instance. Nonetheless, the doctrine of the Trinity has largely retained agreed opinions throughout the church. The reason for this lies in the fact that while ritual traditions and more specifically detailed understandings of Christian themes may vary, the understanding of God remains largely the same across all denominations. The most fundamental matter for Christianity is the belief in the one and the same God, that is, the triune God. Therefore, we may say the belief in the doctrine of the Trinity naturally brings Christians together towards ecumenical openness and inclusiveness.

The second point about the contribution of the recent trinitarian theology to ecumenicalism concerns a particular and perhaps the most representative trend in the recent trinitarian thought. Above all we have to ask the question: 'why ought trinitarian

²¹⁵Cf. Schwöbel points out that the new interest in the trinitarian theology in recent years has started with Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Vladimir Lossky, each representing major ecclesial traditions. He points out that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a doctrine that is concerned with by any particular Christian denomination or theological school. 'The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks' in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, ed. C. Schwöbel, p.2.

theology today to drive us towards ecumenism?'. One obvious answer is found in the nature of recent trinitarian theology that focusses on the social reciprocal ontology of the divine being. As we have seen in our discussion of the four theologians, one important implication drawn is that the pattern of the life and the being of the triune God gives us a unifying inspiration. This is to say that if the being of God is understood in virtue of his reciprocal free relationship in love between three unique Persons, Christians who hold to belief in such a God are likely to open their minds to the possibility of similar relationships in the worldly sphere. This open mind can easily develop into an inclusiveness that can overcome denominational differences. On this view, one can say that trinitarian theology is an ecumenical theology.

Twelfthly, in contemporary trinitarian theology there is a widely agreed opinion against the perception of God in terms of a sexual gender; many theologians say that God is to be understood as bi-sexual or trans-sexual rather than masculine.²¹⁶ Christian theologies, it is claimed, have been developed mostly by men and the consequence is a predominantly masculine symbolism. Boff points out that in some particular cultures, theology is more open to sexism than others, especially where the society is controlled by a male dominant group. In such cultures, the term Father may be understood in a similar way as we conceive the father in the family (as a boss figure over children and women). These images can unconsciously influence the minds of people and force them to accept a form of patriarchy, a male-centred pattern for the wider society and thereby "the predominance of masculine images in Christianity has prevented women from

²¹⁶See Boff, *op.cit.*, pp.121f. LaCugna, *God For Us*, pp.267ff. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp.164f.

expressing their religious experience from within their proper feminine condition and with an adequate symbolism to support them".²¹⁷

Various attempts have been made to deal with this problem. A common response has been to emphasise the feminine character of the Holy Spirit or to appeal to a bisexual insight such as that of the Council of Toledo (675) which spoke of the Son born from "the Father's womb", which offsets the masculine image of God.²¹⁸ A more feminist response comes from theologians such as Elizabeth A. Johnson, who has tried the terms Spirit-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, and Mother-Sophia, to denote each person of the Trinity.²¹⁹ These suggestive solutions, nevertheless, are still sexist and have the effect of acknowledging sexuality of God. Another type of reaction is to find neutral terms to refer to God. Mary Daly suggests that God must be understood as "process" or creative energy rather than as "substance" or a supreme Being.²²⁰ In this case, God can be seen as either Father or Mother, or as both at the same time, "God as maternal Father and paternal Mother". Similarly, some others, notably South American theologians, suggest God to be termed as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. However, while the former view (God as "process") would make God an impersonal subject, the latter is open to a modalistic understanding of God.

²¹⁷Boff, *op.cit.*, p.121.

²¹⁸I.e., Y.Congar, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, vol.3.

²¹⁹Elizabeth A. Johnson, She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse.

²²⁰Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father (Boston, 1973), esp. pp.34ff. Quoted from Boff, *op.cit.*, p.121.

Producing new language to call God and changing traditional terms are not simple matters. Some may argue that since the language Father, for example, is an essential Christian heritage, changing the term would necessarily change Christian faith into something else. On this issue, the report of the Study Commission of the British Council of Churches says,²²¹ firstly, that “it is not a matter of playing abstract and general concept or models against one another, but of finding and defining the words which least inadequately express what we need to say.” Secondly, the Old Testament hardly designates God as Father. God is usually depicted as a nurturing and fostering image. In the New Testament the word is used merely relationally, that is, in terms of the relation between Jesus and his Father. Thirdly, we cannot altogether ignore the historical process in which the gospel took shape. In other words, the Word of God happened to be incarnated in a man, not a woman. Though Jesus could have been a woman, we cannot but accept the fact that God acted so.

The issues of feminist, bi-sexual, or trans-sexual views of God may not be a central part of trinitarian theology, but they nevertheless appear to attract some consideration in trinitarian theology. More conclusive and reliable solutions to this issue are still to come, and for the time being we can only draw a couple of tentative conclusions. Firstly, it seems improper for us not to use the terms Father and Son, since, in line with St Athanasius, God is ‘so named in Scripture.’²²² The New Testament testifies that the Father is ‘Father’ and the Son ‘Son’. Even if the modern usage of the

²²¹BCC, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.37-39.

²²²*Ibid.*, p.39.

terms may not be exactly the same as that of the first century Palestinian culture, arguably there seems to be no better words that can legitimately replace them. Using any terms other than Father and Son seems likely to alter Christian faith dramatically and extensively. Secondly, following Boff's view, we must conceive the terms Father and Son as trans-sexual and understand Father as denoting "the source of life" and Son "the final and full revelation of the original source".²²³ However, neither the terms nor the concepts must be maintained in isolation from the other. While the terms Father and Son in modern condition may cause sexist misunderstanding, over-emphasis of the second view (Boff's) alone can lead to an impersonal subject and damage the personal character of God. The traditional terms and trans-sexual concepts must be complementary to each other.

Thirteenthly, there is a trend in recent thought to associate trinitarianism with the idea of liberation. This is confirmed by John Thomson, who states,

One of the most important developments in the field of theology in the last two decades has been a genuine revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity . . . [T]he emphasis on the *liberation* of human beings and the concomitant social and political thrust has undoubtedly been a contributing factor . . . The double context of salvation and *liberation* in relation to the Trinity has been

²²³Boff, op.cit., p.122.

the prime reason for renewed interest in the doctrine today and in its practical implications.²²⁴

Amongst the four theologians we have examined, it is Moltmann and Boff who are particularly concerned about deriving social and political inspiration from the study of the Trinity. They describe the trinitarian God as 'the liberator of the oppressed'. In Moltmann's case it is the liberation of the believer and the believing community from the bondage of 'evil power' that the kingdom of the triune God is meant to achieve. Moltmann does not give any detailed description of what this evil power is. When he talks about 'evil power', he can be seen as referring, so to speak, to that which does harm to Christian spirituality or the 'right relationship with God', in which case the inner state and quality of the individual person or community as Christian is considered. On the other hand, it is also possible to see Moltmann as having in mind more about the life in the material world, in which case he is considering the social and political conditions of this concrete world that the believer and the believing community encounter, and this is perhaps confirmed by some of his other writings.²²⁵ In Boff's case, it is almost exclusively the material dimension that is in view, that is, the liberation of the oppressed from the exploitation of the dominant class in the society and the social-political regime that legitimates it. In either theologian's case, we may see that the general idea of

²²⁴Thomson, *op.cit.*, p.3. My own emphasis in Italics.

²²⁵I.e., 'A Christian Declaration on Human Rights', *Reformed World* 34 (1976), pp.58-72; 'The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassianism Replacing theological Patriarchalism?', *Concilium* 143 (1981), eds. E. Shillebeeckx & J.B.Metz (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), pp.51-56; 'The Possible Nuclear Catastrophe and Where is God?', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 9 (1988), pp.71-83;

Christian evangelism is deeply associated with the concept of liberation of the oppressed.

In the New Testament in general, however, evangelism is concerned more with personal spiritual salvation, the salvation of the soul, than with anything else. This means that the Christian gospel can be said to emphasise largely the transcendence of the material world and eschatological expectation. It is true, however, that the New Testament is not entirely indifferent to material concerns. Matthew's Gospel, for instance, seems to be concerned largely with the moral behaviour of his community. Nonetheless, it could be argued that there is no noticeable clue that suggests that the author of that Gospel had any particular interest in political lives such as opposition to the exploitation of the poor and the weak by the ruling class. We will discuss this issue later, but for the time being it must be said that Moltmann's social-political interpretation of the Trinity and particularly Boff's view of the triune God as a social liberator appear to give the main gospel teaching a stronger political bias than seems plausible.

What is found in Moltmann and Boff may not be the most influential aspect in recent trinitarian theology, but the relational idea seems to provide the kind of environment in which their particular views can easily be developed. Gunton's treatment of the Trinity, for example, shows some connection with their ideas especially when he speaks of trinitarian implications that include inter-relations between God, the human being, the church, and the world. It is this inclusiveness and open relational possibilities that, firstly, stimulate more adventurous forms of trinitarianism, and secondly allow ideas of a much more immanent God than usually are depicted. This is in line with LaCugna's description of the doctrine of the Trinity as a 'practical' doctrine – although

LaCugna does not seek to speculate about political and social implications as Moltmann and Boff do. In the case of LaCugna, the practicality lies in the life of Christians in worship.

In line with the discussion of evangelism and liberation, one may speak of the recent change in trinitarian thought in terms of a change from individualism to collectivism. If personal salvation is individualistic, liberation must be collectivistic. Traditionally, the Christian religion has been more focussed on individual faith, but Moltmann's treatment of the kingdom of God and Gunton's discussion of a trinitarian ideal of the Christian community and the world show some considerable concern for the worshipping life of Christian people as a whole. The collectivistic feature is even more obvious in Boff than in Moltmann or Gunton. It appears that there is a shift of emphasis in recent trinitarian theology from (the more traditional) individualism to collectivism, in marked contrast to theologies of the past such as Schleiermacher's and Barth's.

In this section so far, I have tried to articulate some key aspects of change in recent trinitarian thought. We have found that recent trinitarian theology, especially from Moltmann onwards, shows a remarkable convergence in thought. We may characterise all these changes in terms of a change from a monistic, static, and psychological, understanding of the Trinity to triadic, dynamic, and sociological one. Recent trinitarian thought is focussed in the main on the social or relational character of the being of the Trinity, and secondly, contemporary trinitarian theology claims that our understanding of the being of the triune God necessarily leads to our adoption of similar attitudes in our own Christian social life.

CHAPTER IV

The fundamental issue:

The disanalogy between God and our world

The overall contribution of recent theological thought to the doctrine of the Trinity is enormous, making it a more intelligible and practical doctrine than it was in the past. Despite having many positive features, however, recent trinitarian theology also appears to have a number of weaknesses which make the doctrine of the Trinity look less integrated. Most of all, one such weakness is the tendency to over-expand the scope of trinitarian implications and give those implications too much weight. Such an approach raises the questions as to whether there is anything at all in human life which is not connected to the doctrine of the Trinity. If we allow every single claim that recent trinitarian theologians have made to determine the relations between the realities of divine and human life, there would be no conceptual demarcations or ontological differences which distinguish between the divine and the human realms. This could be interpreted to mean that human reality in this material world is already perfectly integrated into the divine reality. Does this then mean a total demise of God's transcendence?

One particular type of claim made is that the ontological pattern of the Trinity serves as a model for human social relationships. There is nothing wrong with the claim

if it is meant to signify that there should be a communal integrity and maturity within the Christian community. The claim becomes less justifiable, however, if the adoption of the trinitarian model expands outside the church – as appears to be the case with Gunton and again with Boff, in whom every object (including human and non-human beings) in the universe is in a trinitarian pattern of relationship with some other(s). The tendency to see ‘everything as trinitarian’ seems to be a conceptual abuse. For if we say that our human relationships are (or should be) trinitarian perichoretic, then theoretically the Trinity’s unique pattern of relationship ceases to be unique. Such an indiscriminate trinitarian enthusiasm must be carefully controlled and accepted only in limited cases.

We need to ask a question: ‘Are recent trinitarian theologians taking a responsible role in their claims of ‘trinitarian implications’?’ We have to consider how serious an impact their claims, especially about ‘trinitarian implications’, should make on our Christian life.

In the past, new theological approaches were much more strictly controlled and evaluated by central ecclesiastical authorities than they are now. Theologians were often met with severe punishment if their views were seen to be radical. Since the Reformation, Christian theology has developed in various different ways and modern Christianity is now characterised by a diversity and multiplicity of faith. In this modern environment, the natural consequence is the freedom of theological projects, and there is a much less central control over individual theological opinions. The risk of condemnation and persecution of theologians with innovative ideas has been considerably reduced. In the light of this it is worth asking whether the sense of responsibility and duty of contemporary theologians has also been reduced accordingly.

Gunton's unnecessarily reiterated expression that 'today's trinitarian theology needs to explore new conceptual possibilities' may itself be evidence that he himself feels that his theological approach may look too radical. In specifying and examining the problems I raise, we need to take a more critical and less sympathetic approach. In this way we may be able to overcome what can be described today as a problem of over-leniency in the theological environment. This may be how we can remain faithful to doing theology responsibly.

From the thought of recent trinitarian theologians we have examined, there does emerge one conspicuous claim calling for action, namely, that the trinitarian God inspires us to establish perichoretic trinitarian social relationships in the church, in the society and in the rest of the world. Recent theological works on the Trinity seem to impose the task of making the world sociologically a trinitarian one. On the level of theory, by reading recent theological works, we achieve a better understanding about God the Trinity whom we worship. However, what lesson do we learn in practice from those works? Is it the task of 'sociologically' transforming our Christian community, the society and the wide world by basing them on trinitarian principles? This is the kind of overall impression that is given from the works of some leading theologians, and we must take them seriously. Perhaps there is not much wrong with the idea of endeavouring to imitate the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity. But it becomes problematic if we are urged to see that idea as an essential part of the Christian gospel. Are we supposed to imitate the way the triune God is and lives? Is the idea that our ecclesiastical and social life should be like the inner relationships of God the Trinity an imperative Christian order? Is it necessarily less Christian if we do not try to, or are

unable to, imitate the social life of God. More fundamentally, is it achievable – in our human material conditions? What is the criterion by which we know that we have achieved this?

Let us now specify some of these problems in order. Firstly, the idea that Christian individuals and communities must imitate the perichoretic sociality of the Trinity is a conceptual manipulation, especially in the light of the fact that it receives inadequate support from the scriptures. Secondly, the tendency to claim – as maintained notably in Moltmann and Boff and also in LaCugna and Gunton to a less degree – that ‘since God is triadic everything must be triadic’ seems to be an over-interpretation of a simple fact that God is three Persons in communion. Thirdly, the view that every human relationship must be on an absolute equality is not applicable in many areas of our concrete life. Fourthly, that the equation of the concept of the ‘person’ of God with that of the human person, or to see the former as an essential norm for defining the latter is a tenuous claim. Considering all these problems, most of which receive little biblical support, one can ask whether there is some kind of forced manipulation of reasoning in the thought of those theologians, who are simply motivated by the desire to make their individual work on the Trinity look maximally ‘trinitarian’. In the following section we will examine these problems in more detail.

The first problem we will examine here concerns the view that the perichoretic pattern of divine being and life is essentially or necessarily a model for human relationships. In the works of the four theologians, I have found no persuasive logical reasons which support the view – except one or two biblical references, which will be discussed later. One typical argument runs as follows: ‘since God the Trinity is in a

perichoretic relationship, human beings, as his creation, must also have the same pattern of relationship'. It is not obvious whether this kind of argument is persuasive at all since it does not really say why it should be so.

Most of all, the idea does not receive adequate biblical support. There are not many biblical passages which in one way or another suggest a necessity of human imitation of God's sociality. Perhaps one may pay attention to the biblical verses like the commandment of Jesus: 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 15.12; cf. 13.34). Loving one another does have a link, though remotely, with the thesis that we are to follow the form of God's communion. In other words, provided that we understand God's nature as outwardness and thus God's nature as outreaching to what is not God, the commandment that we must love one another as he loved us could be interpreted as suggesting an imitation of God's nature of outwardness and relatedness. Nevertheless, the link is only by implication. Moreover, we can still love one another without belonging to a reasonably recognisable social setting of reciprocal relationship. For example, a political prisoner, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, may have still loved many of his acquaintances, his local community, his church and the nation, but as long as he was in prison he practically had no social belonging except to the prison, since imprisonment is functionally meant to seclude the prisoner from outer society. More than anything else, there is a huge gap between the idea of imitating God's social life and the general tone of the New Testament message.

Our four theologians do, though, give some reasons. The first is that 'man is made in the image and the likeness of God' (Gene.1:26, 27) – in the case of Boff and LaCugna – and the second is Jesus' prayer for the church (John 17: 20-26) – in the case

of Gunton. Do the two biblical sources do justice to the claim for the divine modelling of human relationships? We need to examine these two biblical claims.

We are told that 'man is made in the image and the likeness of God and so human beings have to adopt the perichoretic communion of the Trinity'.²²⁶ But what does 'the image and likeness of God' mean? It is difficult to interpret its meaning. Exegetical opinions vary. According to one view,²²⁷ what is meant is that man was made "in the moral and spiritual image of God, a free relational being". Anthony Philips says that the image may refer to man's "intimate relationship with the divine world", thus suggesting "man's paradoxical position of both nearness to and yet distance from God".²²⁸ Gerhard von Rad says the passage about the image of God in man does not directly explain what form man is taking on from God, but comments that the real point about the verses has rather to do with "the purpose for which the image is given to man", that is, a stewardship as lord in the world so as to manifest the sovereign authority of God.²²⁹ As seen in this example of mixed opinions, it is difficult to draw a clear conclusion. Having in mind this difficulty, we need to examine a number of possibilities.

Firstly, when we say that we are like God, can we interpret this as referring to our physical and biological form as shared by Jesus Christ? Some may argue that Jesus' physical body was formed much later than the creation story of the Genesis, but it can

²²⁶Cf., LaCugna, *God For Us*, p.292; Boff, op. cit., pp.11, 24.

²²⁷*Study Bible* (RSV), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), ed. Harold Lindsell.

²²⁸A.Philips, *Lower than the Angel. Question raised by Genesis 1-11*, p.18.

²²⁹Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol.1, p.144-47.

also be argued that the human form God the Son assumed, had already been anticipated at the time of the creation. Perhaps this possibility has to be ruled out since it does not fit well with the saying "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). It is difficult to imagine God as having a physical body from all eternity.

If it is not a physical body that was referred to by 'the image and the likeness', is it a possession of mentality or consciousness? This view may look more plausible at first. However, do animals not also have a mentality or consciousness? One may say that having our kind of mentality or consciousness is one thing that distinguishes us from animals since the latter's mentality are merely biologically bound and thus much less creative and complex and certainly much less significant in terms of intelligence than that of the human being. A close observance of animals suggests that they live and do things according to their pre-determined genetic programmes. They have much less choice of action in everyday life and their pattern of behaviour is much easier to predict than that of human beings. What about the human being? Certainly the mentality of the human creature is much more creative, imaginative, and of hugely greater potential. In this sense, it may be said that the human being is rather more like God than animals. However, we can also question whether the human being's mentality is significant enough to be compared to that of God? My view is that the possession of mental capacity is not totally inconsistent with 'the image' that was referred to in the Genesis sayings. Our concern is, nevertheless, whether possession of mentality or consciousness itself determines a trinitarian sociality. That God has given us mentality has no direct link with our imitation of the social pattern of the trinitarian God's being and life.

Is it the possession of spirit – or soul, depending on our theological understanding – that was referred to in the saying of the image and the likeness of God? This makes sense. As God is spirit,²³⁰ the human being's possession of a spirit²³¹ makes a reasonable counterpart. Here we need to consider that in Genesis 2:7 God "breathed into his [man's] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Although the RSV renders "a living being", it could also be understood as 'a spiritual being' In this case, what was breathed into the nostrils of man was not merely life (or vitality) but also a spirit. The real difficulty is whether the verses Genesis 2:4b onwards (the so-called 'J' account) is a separate account of the same incident that occurred at the creation of man in Genesis 1 (the Priestly account), as most Old Testament scholars now believe, or a continuous account that follows the initial human creation described in Genesis 1. If it is the same account, the human spirit was given to man simultaneously when 'the life was breathed', whereas if it is a sequel account, and thus describing a different incident, then the breathing of Genesis 2 describes the giving of the spirit to man who had initially been created without one – in this case, we are talking about the view that the human being consists of body, soul and spirit (1Thess.5:23). Whichever view we may take, it makes sense anyway, that what makes the human being distinguished from animals but makes him resemble God is the fact that the human being has a spirit. In this consideration, it is not impossible to say that it is the possession of spirit that is referred

²³⁰John 4:24, cf. 2Cor. 3:17, 18, 7:1, 1John 4:2, etc.

²³¹John 6:63; Rom. 8:10, 16; 1Cor. 2:11, 5:3-5, 7:34, 14:14-16, 32; 1Thess. 5:23, 2:2; Heb. 4:12, 12:23; 1Pete. 3:18-19, 4:6., etc.

to by 'the image and likeness of God'. However, there is as yet no clear indication that could relate the social ontology of God to human beings.

Does 'the image and likeness of God' refer to the personal character of God? This view is worth taking into account since it allows a plausible connection between human sociality and divine sociality. This view is better explained in the context of the theology of Augustine who produced psychological analogies of the Trinity, which we have already discussed earlier. The problem with this view, however, is that it is too difficult to articulate which characteristics of God's person are meant to be taken on by the human being – are they love, patience, justice, righteousness, holiness or others? Most of all, if man at creation was given certain personal characteristic that resembles God's in accordance with the divine programming, there is no need to demand human beings to follow the way of God's communion since they would already be acting just as they are programmed.

Does image mean lordship; thus indicating the dominating position of the human being in the world just as God is lord of all things? This view is not untenable and can fit relatively well into the context of Genesis. But, however convincing this view may be, we still have the difficulty of relating lordship with God's social pattern of self-relationship.

Another possibility for the meaning of 'the image' is that it is the combination of various qualities including, possession of the spirit, rationality, and our possession of a number of personal characteristics of God. On this view, 'the image and the likeness' means the overall resemblance of the human being to God. Such a view can also make sense since the human being is in many ways clearly distinguished from any other form

of creature, and the human being is seen to be rather more like God than any other form of living thing – though this raises the complicated question of the definition of ‘being God’. Nevertheless, the view of ‘overall resemblance’ is not adequately convincing as the definition and boundary of ‘overall resemblance’ is not clear. Considering the literary nature of Genesis 1 and 2, which has a highly condensed and compact form with a minimum of redundant descriptions, it would be hard to imagine that such distinct words as ‘the image and the likeness’ were originally used for a purpose which appeared so ambiguous, namely that the human being is ‘rather more like’ God than other forms of life. Here, God’s inner sociality as a model for human sociality is irrelevant.

Whichever is the most appropriate interpretation of the image, our problem remains unchanged: how can human relationship be like God’s inner communion? Barth claims that ‘the image’ is found in the humanity of Jesus Christ, which is the true expression of our humanity. This is perhaps one of the most trustworthy theological explanations available, if not ‘the’ explanation. It not only supports the idea of Jesus Christ’s true humanity but it also explains the possible divine-human communion. Barth maintains that as Jesus was fully in communion with the Father and the Spirit, in Jesus who is the paradigm of our humanity we are also made in full communion with the Father and the Spirit as well as with Jesus Christ. Therefore, what we learn from this view is that if we have placed ourselves in communion with Jesus, we are already in communion with the triune God. It is this divine-human communion in which human persons are also united through the power of the Holy Spirit. The question is, however, whether the union between human persons in the Spirit can become as perfect a communion as that found in God. The difficulty with this view is the fact that human

unitedness, while we are in earth, will never be the same as the inner communion of the triune God. The kind of logic used by some trinitarian theologians to prove that our human relationship can be like the communion of the triune God seem to be a mistaken assumption.

This lengthy discussion has tried to expose whether there is some noteworthy connection between 'the image of God' and human social union. Such a quest seems of little profit. All attempts to derive from the saying of 'the image of God' an acknowledgeable association between the social pattern of divine being and life and inter-human relationships, find it difficult to avoid a considerable conceptual leap. Perhaps one that is prerequisite in dealing with the present issue may be a cautious suspicion of our own fundamental presumptions. For example, when contemporary theologians are speaking of 'the image of God', they are unconsciously reflecting the way Augustine developed a psychological concept of the Trinity. He believed that, in creating the world, God must have left a characteristic imprint of himself upon his human creature, since man is made in the image and likeness of God. It, then, follows that the structure of the human mind must be grounded in the being of God. Thus he identified the trace of the Trinity with a triadic form of human psychology - mind, knowledge, and love (*mens, notitia, and amor*), and he also related this triadic form with memory, understanding, and will (*memoria, intelligentia, and voluntas*). Augustine acknowledged that these analogies are not adequate but argued that, however inadequate they were, they still depict an image of God. What is striking in the present standpoint is the suspicion that some contemporary theologians - while criticising the way Augustine attempted to understand the being of the Trinity in terms of human

psychology – are in fact adopting a similar approach. They found that there is a serious lack of biblical support for their trinitarian theories but they have also noticed that Genesis 1:26-27 provides a rather useful support; they could not afford the luxury of not using these verses, regardless of their precise meaning. The results are clumsy reasoning in their argument, and a feeble claim which is merely based on 'implications'.

Most importantly, there is a contradiction in the way those theologians attempt to make use of the term 'the image' in connection with the human situation. In actual fact, the verses in Genesis are suggesting that we human beings have received at creation something that is also part of God's nature. We have to consider that whatever in us is common with or resembles God's, it is an inborn nature which, whether we like it or not, is already part of the constitution of our human being. It is not something that we can resist or cancel; possession of 'the image' is already included in the finalised form of human existence. Again, what is envisaged in the statement that God made man in his own image is not that at creation he gave the latter merely a sort of idealism or motivation according to which men and women are to develop their own being in their actual life to become like God after the creation itself, since this would signify that no actual image of God was implanted in the human being at all at creation. On the contrary, to be faithful to the context of the Genesis passage, we have to say that the part of our nature that was meant by 'the image of God' was already given at creation and the image is thus a constitutional component of our human being. In this case, we have no need to make any endeavour to adopt the image of God since we already have it, so the claim 'Let us try to be like him!' becomes senseless because we cannot try to become what we already are.

One may argue here that what was implanted in us at creation, which made us the image of God, was lost or deformed at the Fall and that we are therefore to recover it by uniting ourselves with God. This may sound legitimate. However, as long as the focus is on the divine modelling for human existence, the argument cannot avoid various problems. For example, according to the account in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were still not like God even before they were corrupted, since the serpent allured Eve, saying 'You will be like God' (Gen. 3:5). How then can human beings recover what they have never had? Moreover, in some Christian tradition, the idea of 'becoming like God' is regarded as dangerous; it is sometimes characterised as 'satanic'. Isaiah 14 depicts an evil figure referred to as "Day Star, son of Dawn", challenging God by saying "I will ascend to heaven above the stars of God . . . I will make myself like the Most High." This example is consistent with that of the serpent in the common factor being the idea of 'becoming like God', which denotes a rebellion against God.

Despite the problems that can be caused by an appeal to the Fall, I believe that the event of Eden may still provide a crucial key to the explanation of 'the image of God'. The four theologians, however, are almost silent about this kind of fundamental and systematic explanation.²³² The result are lack of intelligible logic and a train of questions from their readers in uncertainty of what precisely they are being told. The natural conclusion from this analysis so far is that the expression, 'man is made in the image and the likeness of God', does not support the view that the human beings must

²³²Even where the issue is faced more directly, there remains problems. See, for example, M.Volf, *After Our likeness*, esp. his criticism of Zizioulas' view of baptism and eucharist.

imitate the way of God's internal perichoresis. Consequently, connecting the divine sociality to human sociality is a conceptual mis-interpretation of the biblical expression.

An alternative biblical reason for why human beings must follow God's trinitarian mutual relationships is grounded on Jesus' prayer for the church in the Fourth Gospel. Here we find a more sensible reason.

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

(John 17:20-22, RSV.)

Attention must be paid to the expression: "that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one". This is precisely the ground on which Moltmann believes the unity of the church is based.²³³ Surely, the biblical passage speaks of a human communion that is based on the divine communion. Nevertheless, this reflected human communion is confined within the church. Moreover, it is not any egalitarian motivation that made the biblical statements into existence. It is

²³³Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, pp.201-202.

the unity of believers or the purity of faith in the one God that is of concern. Thus the object of the statements is evangelical, as implied by the words: "so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me". It is a 'spiritual' matter rather than egalitarian one the passage is handling.

It is be worth examining this passage purely on an exegetical level in order to see more clearly its meaning. In his commentary John Marsh summarises the passage by saying that it was written so "that all who believe might share in the same unity and the same glory that characterize the Godhead in the unity of Father and Son. Such a participation in the perfect unity of the Godhead will be both an historical and an eschatological privilege of the Church".²³⁴ No matter whether the 'perfect unity' is eschatological, as Bultmann believes, or a historical reality, as others believe, this passage is no doubt exclusively aimed at Christian communities, that is, the church. The same interpretation, namely that the biblical statements are for the church is also found in Barnabas Lindars who comments on "that they may be one" (20:21): "The fact that it is stressed so strongly here . . . shows that this is a burning issue for John. To him disunity is a denial of the faith".²³⁵

Jesus' prayer for the church can be understood as having a twin purpose: the preservation of the faith of the church and evangelism. It is hard to draw from it anything like a humanitarian or egalitarian conclusion. This is clear from the views of

²³⁴J.Marsh, The Gospel of St John.

²³⁵B.Lindars, The Gospel of John.

those same commentators. For example, on the clause “so that the world may believe that thou has sent me”, Marsh comments that

it is the unity of believers in the Church that will be the effective testimony to the love of the Father, assured to men in the mission of Jesus the Christ. For such a unified community to exist at all is an eloquent testimony to its supernatural origin . . . what is envisaged in this prayer is that the world should come to believe, and so to be saved.²³⁶

On the same clause, Lindars concentrates on the idea that “a disunited Christian community denies by its behaviour the message which it proclaims”.²³⁷ Again, there is no notable implication for a triadic social pattern commended for the church – not least in the fact that the mention of the Spirit is missing. We can only remotely derive some connection between God’s inner relationship and the unitedness of the Christian community. Even in this case, no human inter-relationship is implied. Jesus is the middle term, thus the point is the analogical pattern of mutual indwelling between the Father and Jesus and between Jesus and the church. An independent view of community spirit, egalitarianism, or humanitarianism, between believers is not envisaged at all.

Apart from the two biblical sources, we have not been given any other decisive or worthwhile biblical reasons from the theologians we examined earlier. Such a lack

²³⁶Marsh, *op. cit.*.

²³⁷Lindars, *op. cit.*.

of biblical backing for the thesis, that 'the doctrine of the Trinity is our social programme,' would naturally mean that the thesis is merely a product of human reasoning. What are, then, the reasons external to Scripture?

One view supporting the thesis concerns the concept of person – largely the position maintained by Gunton. God is personal and as the Supreme Person his being provides the norm for the being of human person. In Gunton's view, if God's personal nature is relational as seen in his perichoretic communion, then accordingly human beings must be relational. Here is the reason for the connection between the trinitarian God's communion and human mutual social relationships. As we will discuss once again later in more detail, however, the equation of the personhood of God and the human being is subject to severe critical scrutiny. Does God's being personal necessitate human persons having the same character that God has in his inner relations? This seems to say that if we have defined what the nature of human personhood is, then we have already defined what the nature of God's personhood is. That God is personal hardly determines human beings' social relationships.

If the view of the relation between constitutions of the Trinity and that of the human social communion is valid, it is so only in an indirect and limited sense, so to speak, as relation between God and the Church. In this case, the whole of humankind, which Moltmann and Boff have seen as reflecting the Trinity, is replaced by those who participate in the communion with God by the grace of Christ and the work of the indwelling Spirit. This is consistent with what Grigorios Larentzakis says: "The church is the people of God the Father, the body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit .

. . . The knowledge of God wrought by the triune God has soteriological and community character."²³⁸

It must be remembered that when we say that 'God so loved the world,' 'the world' is better to be understood symbolically as referring to 'believers' and not to 'every human being' – while it is tenable to say that God's love is manifested in his giving a chance to all human beings to be in union with him. Thus the concept of 'covenant' between God and the people of Israel in the Old Testament is the essential element – although it is now the church (or believers), the new Israel, which replaces the people of Israel and are with a new covenant with God.

Once again, whether it be the believing community or all human beings that are said to be in need of transformation into a divine pattern of communion, it is highly doubtful if human sociality can ever be like that of the Trinity, because there are some particular characteristics that pertain only to the divine Persons. One such is that which can be described as 'lack of need'. Quoting from G. Manzardis, Larentzakis observes that

The triune God represents a fellowship of love. The characteristic nature of this love is a lack of need. Each person of the trinity is perfect God. Therefore, the fellowship of love of the persons is not to be understood

²³⁸Grigorios Larentzakis, 'Trinitärischer Kirchenverständnis,' in *Trinität: Aktuelle Perspektiven der Theologie*, Wilhelm Breuning, ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1984), p.84-5, quoted in Thomson, *op.cit.*, p.84.

as pressure to receive what one needs but is the expression of perfection and of lack of need.²³⁹

It is hard to envisage any circumstance in human life in which a person can be completely free of any need. A human person always need something – whether it be physical, mental (or emotional), financial, social, or political – from, for example, family, friends, neighbours, the local community, the country. In fact, there are so many that can be applied to this ‘something’ that it is not even easy to find an appropriate way of categorising it. Sometimes such needs are fulfilled, but often they are not, and there are always many things which the human person still feels the need. By contrast, in divine communion, each Person of the Trinity is, as Larentzakis sees, perfect and lacks need. In the love which binds them together, there is no pressure to give or to receive. If we say that we are given a responsibility or task of helping the weaker and the dominated in our society and this is how we conform to the image of God the Trinity – as maintained by Moltmann and Boff in particular – it would be a logical contradiction, since there is neither any responsibility or task imposed on, nor any pressure, decision, or contract for such a task given, within the Trinity. Rather, it may be a more intelligible and acceptable explanation to say that we must learn from God’s love shown to us through Jesus Christ and practice this love to others. This is consistence with Jesus’ love command and to an extent with the statement in the Lord’s Prayer: “And forgive us our debtors, As we also have forgiven our debtors.” It is clear that the nature of communion

²³⁹Ibid., p.108.

between the three Persons of the Trinity is hugely different from what can be expected from human sociality.

It is problematic if the doctrine of the Trinity is solely based on an external observation of God's trinitarian history with the world. Richard Bauckham sees that Moltmann's weak point is "to abstract the Trinity in itself from God's trinitarian history with the world . . . in order to make the Trinity in itself a model for human life," and argues that Moltmann "has been trapped into this by an insufficient critical appropriation of the tradition's idea of the trinitarian image of God in humanity."²⁴⁰ Moltmann holds that the human community modelled on the Trinity both reflects and participates in God's own communal life. In this Moltmann is actually maintaining two different concepts: that the inner life of the Trinity is an interpersonal communion in which we participate, and that the life of the Trinity offers a model for our social life.²⁴¹ In the first concept, we experience the trinitarian fellowship *internally* and this fellowship is "specific" and "differentiated" in relation to each of the three Persons. In the second case, however, we are only to observe the trinitarian communion *externally* and merely to learn the lesson for our social relationship from this observation. While the second idea does not receive any support from the New Testament, it is "artificially combined with the first idea."²⁴² The actual fact is that we recognise, and are related to, each of the Trinity only, as in the first idea, in the participation of the divine life. "It means,"

²⁴⁰Bauckham, The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, p.164.

²⁴¹Ibid., p.177- 82. Cf. Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, p.157f.

²⁴²Bauckham, The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, p.177.

Bauckham says, "that true human community comes about, not as an image of trinitarian fellowship, but as the Spirit makes us like Jesus in his community with the Father and with others."²⁴³ Importantly, the second idea ignores not only our highly differentiated relationship with each of the Trinity but also the differentiated relationships between the trinitarian Persons. Such a view "encourages us to apply the term person as univocally to the three divine Persons as we do to human persons," and, ironically, this is also what Moltmann wishes to avoid, as he opposes it elsewhere in the same book.²⁴⁴ The problem with the second idea, which is also seen in Boff and Gunton, is not only that it is incompatible with the central New Testament theme of the immanent reality of the Trinity, it also leads to the danger of speculating on the Son in isolation from the incarnation and the Spirit from his indwelling character.²⁴⁵

In conclusion, God has his own unique pattern of life, and the human being also has its own. There is no way we can confidently argue in universal terms that God's being and life determine human social behaviour. The nature of God's inner communion is intrinsically irrelevant to the pattern of human social life. Rather, as Bauckham maintains, they are relevant in "the relationships of the Persons in their relationships with the world."²⁴⁶ The nature of God's being as 'personal', does not necessitate the sociality of human persons to be exactly like God's inner social pattern. "The mystery

²⁴³Ibid., p.178.

²⁴⁴Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, pp.188-90.

²⁴⁵Bauckham, op.cit., p.164.

²⁴⁶Ibid..

of the triunity can be found only in the deity itself, not in the creature," and thus the triune God is the object of our worship but not imitation.²⁴⁷ The qualitative difference between God's being and the human being cannot be measured in a specific term; at least the difference is much greater than it is assumed in some of the recent theological writings. God at creation has imposed upon us limitations, and these limitations are God's law, the way God has determined humankind to be. We are seriously limited in potentiality and ability when compared to God and that is why we have to be totally dependent on God who created us. Being unable and insufficient means being perfectly human. Not only is it impossible to have exactly the same perichoretic relationship as God has in himself, but any achievement of what we believe to be a similar perichoretic relationship within our human conditions would be nowhere near what God uniquely has in his divine communion.

The second problem we deal with now is the tendency in recent trinitarian thought to suppose that since God is triadic everything must be triadic. For example, when Moltmann deals with the history of the Son he describes almost every aspect of Jesus Christ's ministerial life in triadic forms of relations with the Father and the Spirit.²⁴⁸ He also speaks of the "trinitarian creation" of the world²⁴⁹, "trinitarian

²⁴⁷Erik Peterson, "Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem," in *Theologische Traktate* (Munich: Kösel, 1951), p.105, quoted in Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp.192f.

²⁴⁸Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp.61-96.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp.111ff.

Incarnation" of the Son²⁵⁰, "trinitarian glorification" through the Spirit²⁵¹. Further, he opens up an inquiry into the trinitarian concept of Person.²⁵² Finally, he develops his understanding of the kingdom of God in a totally trinitarian way.²⁵³ As such Moltmann interprets many areas of Christian dogmatics as in a triadic pattern. Moltmann's intention is justifiable insofar as God as the Trinity is in a triadic relation within himself. The overall impression is, however, that Moltmann's approach is deductive rather than inductive. In other words, he interprets everything in terms of a ready-made framework.

Such a tendency is even more clear in Boff's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, he says,

If God were one alone, there would be solitude and concentration in unity and oneness. If God were two, a duality, Father and Son only, there would be separation (one being distinct from the other) and exclusion (one not being the other). But God is *three*, a Trinity, and being three avoids solitude, overcomes separation and surpasses exclusion. The Trinity allows identity (the Father), difference of identity (the Son) and difference of difference (the Holy Spirit). Trinity prevents face-to-face

²⁵⁰Ibid., pp.121 ff.

²⁵¹Ibid., pp.126ff.

²⁵²Ibid., pp.171 ff.

²⁵³Ibid., pp.191-222.

confrontation between Father and Son in a “narcissistic”
contemplation. The third figure is the difference, the
openness, communion.²⁵⁴

The point of the argument is not that God is fundamentally a Trinity, for that is what God is, but that in order to avoid loneliness or a narcissism, God has to be three Persons. What Boff appears to say is thus that it is a logical necessity that God must be in a triadic form of being. However effective the literary device he is adopting may actually be, it does not completely conceal his intention of wordplay. If God were two, for instance, why would there be a separation? Would not the Two make a good union? Does not the abundance of twin principles in our culture tells us of some authenticity, as proved with our frequently used words such as ‘pair’, ‘match’, ‘couple’, ‘give and take’, ‘duo’, ‘male and female’, ‘old and young’, ‘poor and rich’, ‘tall and short’, ‘yes and no’, ‘with and without’, ‘active and passive’, ‘heaven and earth’, ‘darkness and light’, ‘- (minus) and + (plus), and positive and negative? Moreover, one central aspect of the traditional oriental philosophy originated in China and decisively influential in most East Asian culture is the principle of the harmony between – and + (or negative and positive), which is said to explain all phenomena of the universe including human life. Supposedly, Boff would have used these twin words and concepts if God happened to be Two instead of Three. Speaking in terms of statistical probability, if there is a third member, is this not more likely to lead to a separation among the three than when there are only two members? More importantly, would not God be still managing a perfect

²⁵⁴Boff, *op.cit.*, p.3.

union no matter whether he was Two, Four, or whatever the number? What is the significance that the language of 'difference of difference of identity' assumes? Is it not the fact that God happens to be 'three Persons' in communion that we are talking about a triadic pattern of relationship, rather than that God has to be Three because of logical necessity? Boff, in this case and others, seems to pressurise himself to produce as many triadic forms as possible.

Here again, in order to clarify the problem, we need to examine a little more of Moltmann. Moltmann's treatment of the kingdom of God also seems to be a product of a forced manipulation to fit into the ready-made principle of the triadic. In favour of Joachim's position, Moltmann refuses to accept the orthodox Protestant understanding of the kingdom of God which is divided into two eras, the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace.²⁵⁵ Yet as a matter of fact, the orthodox Protestant view makes more sense than Moltmann's. Moltmann's approach tends to dilute the remarkable change in the human plight made by Jesus Christ's redemptive mission which includes his death, resurrection and sending of the Spirit. From Moltmann's position, Jesus' mission takes on only a partial importance to both us human beings and God himself. The coming of Jesus Christ marked the most significant transition in human destiny, and this is all that is important about Christian faith. Even from God's point of view, Jesus' death and resurrection must also be the most crucial events, in the fact that God offered his only Son to die. It is awkward to say that human destiny is characterised by three different crucial changes; it is much more intelligible to say that the human race or a human

²⁵⁵Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, pp.207-209.

person experiences 'the' most crucial change of life in Jesus Christ. In the same way, God's saving act in Jesus Christ does not merely assume one third importance – alongside the creation (the kingdom of the Father) and sanctification (the kingdom of the Spirit). It is the one, concrete, historical fact that Jesus died and was raised from dead that changes everything.

According to Moltmann, the three eras refer to a triple stage of maturity of Christian faith in a person, but in effect it unnecessarily prolongs the maturing process of the believer. In Acts 9 the process of Paul's conversion was immediate. It was only a matter of days since he had been confronted by Christ on the way to Damascus and had hands laid on by Ananias, until he reappeared at Damascus as a witness to Jesus. In Acts 10, the conversion of Cornelius, the first gentile Christian, and his household was immediate and there was no further maturing stages mentioned or implied in the Bible, in contrast to the belief of Moltmann. In terms of time span, if Moltmann's view is taken and reflected in the case of Paul and Cornelius, the kingdom of the Father lasted for thousands of years for both Paul and Cornelius, but the kingdom of the Son lasted for only a few days for Paul and (supposedly) only for a few hours for Cornelius. Perhaps Moltmann is thinking of conversion as a relatively slow maturing process. But this is not the way the New Testament describes it; the change of human plight does not require a prolonged period of maturing. Moltmann may have a point or two in other ways, but it does dilute the fact of the revolutionary and immediate change of destiny in Christians experience. It seems that inspired by the presentation of Joachim's threefold kingdom of God, Moltmann was numerically occupied and thus anxious to draw a triadic

conclusion on the kingdom of God. The consequence was the production of a doctrine that is only remotely related to the reality of the Christian life.

We need to correct the tendency of saying that if God is in a triadic communion, then everything else has to be interpreted in a triadic form. If the doctrine of the Trinity is to be a more trustworthy doctrine, the exposition of the Trinity has to be more moderate, accurate, and direct. The kind of logic that if God is triadic, everything in this material world must also be triadic, is highly deductive, and thus over-expands and dilutes truths which should be confined to God himself. If the scope of the adaption of the triadic principle is extended without being controlled, sooner or later there will be a day on which we will say that 'since God's being is triadic, let us change our bicycle into a tricycle!'

The third problem of recent trinitarian theology, which is also closely connected with the second problem, is the view that every human relationship must be based on an absolute equality. While this view is more or less commonly maintained by the four theologians, it is particularly evident in Boff. He maintains that because the Persons of the Trinity are absolutely equal in generic status and divinity, people must adopt this equality in concrete life in the society.²⁵⁶ Let us take an example of what he says:

... This is where faith in the Holy Trinity, in the mystery of perichoresis, of the trinitarian communion and divine society, takes on a special resonance, since the Trinity

²⁵⁶Boff., op. cit., pp.9-16 and elsewhere in this work.

can be seen as a model for any just, egalitarian (while respecting differences) social organization. On the basis of their faith in the triune God, Christians postulate a society that can be the image and likeness of the Trinity. Father in the Trinity of Persons, Father, son and Holy Spirit, can be seen to offer a response to the great quest for participation, equality and communion that fires the understanding of the oppressed.²⁵⁷

The quotation is a good example of a Christian ethical exhortation. But the problem is, how much are human beings able to take on the kind of communion and equality that is unique to the triune God? What is the criterion from which we can judge whether or not a human relationship is like God? Can human beings ever be able to achieve the level of equality that characterises the communion of the Trinity?

Most of all, the expression, 'a just and egalitarian society', is meant by Boff to be a characteristic attribution of the triune God. Is God, however, a supporter of egalitarian idealism? God never endeavours to develop his own relationship between the Trinity to be 'just or egalitarian'; it is merely that 'we' attempt to derive such a character of God from our faith, biblical knowledge, and personal experience of God. God does not try to be egalitarian within his own mutual relationship in the Trinity as though the Persons of the Trinity are deliberately or necessarily bound by some behavioural principle. God may be egalitarian in his dealing with human individuals, but not within

²⁵⁷Ibid., p.11.

himself. A clear distinction must be made between God as egalitarian within himself and God as such in his outward relationship with his creatures. As a matter of fact, however, in many parts of the Bible God is not described as egalitarian even in his outward relationship with human beings. Just to mention a few examples from the Bible, in the Old Testament stories of Jacob and Esau, Isaac's twelve sons, Jesse's seven sons, King Saul and David, and the story of Solomon, there is a clear favouritism of God towards particular persons exclusive of others; there seems to be no egalitarian principle applied. In the New Testament we also find a similar favouritism of God, for example, in the story of Mary and Martha (the sisters of Lazarus). The account of the story of the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet is a still more striking example: Jesus showed a firm favouritism toward the behaviour of the woman against the egalitarian and humanitarian principle on the bases of which the Jews accused him. In all these examples, God's concern was not necessarily egalitarianism or humanitarian justice, but faith in God. This means that the faith in God has the precedence over justice, egalitarian and humanitarian ideals. Considering this, the claim that the characteristic of the triune reality of God is just and egalitarian is a hasty assumption that is really grounded on human values in ethics.

Another difficulty with an excessive emphasis on egalitarianism concerns the question of the extent and degree to which equality can be applicable to our real life. The actual fact is that various parts of our social life look more natural when they are set in inequality. Perhaps this is consistent with Augustine's teaching on the nature of the Good, which was also developed by Aquinas. Inspired by the biblical sayings of 'everything looks good' (Gen 1:31) and 'every creature of God is good' (1Tim. 4:4),

Augustine maintained that every being that exists derives its being from God, the Supreme Good, and all being is good in whatever 'measure' (or 'condition'), 'form' and 'order' it may have been given by God until it is corrupted.²⁵⁸ This led to an aesthetic view of the universe: the universe consists of various forms of beings – some are more good and some are less good than others – and all these beings make an overall harmony of the universe exactly as God intended in creation. Thus, even imperfection and inequality can be look beautiful to God.

The fact is that in our society there are many areas in which inequality is almost the natural law. In the family relationship, for example, equality is hardly a characteristic feature. Between the father and the child there is no true equality until the child grows physically and mentally mature enough to live separately from the family. The father is superior to the child financially, in authority and on family decisions, experience, and many other areas, and perhaps physically while the child is still young; whereas the child is supposed to obey his or her father in most matters.

Similarly, in schools, a teacher and a pupil cannot be equal; equality is not an appropriate word to describe the teacher-pupil relationship. Perhaps superior and inferior are not the right words to describe the relation either, but equality is even more inappropriate a description. Even the relationship between pupils may not always be maintained by the principle of equality. In some far-Eastern societies (including China, Korea, and Japan), like the one in which I was brought up, inequality between pupils is often taken for granted and even regarded as a virtue: the members in a lower form are

²⁵⁸St Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, in Augustine: Earlier Writings; St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologie, vol.2 (1a 2-11).

encouraged to show respect to those in a higher form. To be fair to ethical sensibility, of course, the pupils in the higher form are also encouraged to respect those in the lower form but this 'respect' is more like a 'looking after' rather than an 'admiration'. In such a society this vertical relationship mirrors the social culture itself. Schools often make young people accustomed to this vertical pattern of inter-personal social relationship in preparation for their future life in the wider society. As far as the school culture is concerned, the egalitarian ideal may suit the Western society better, but we cannot leave out altogether the Eastern culture from our consideration.

Another example of inequality in society is the work place. The employer and the employee cannot be equal in every way; there is a distinction between the employer and the employee even though both work together. In military organisations, inequality is vital; maintaining inequality is a prime virtue to keep the organization in order. The prime minister is not equal in authority with his cabinet members.

Even personal inter-relationships in many other areas of our society cannot always be equal, for example, the relationship between the lender and the borrower or the landlord and the tenant. It is the lender's discretion to be lenient to the borrower, but it is fair and just for the lender to ask what he has lent out to be returned from the latter – as long as the contract is not breached – even if this would drive the borrower into a difficult financial situation. When this happens, it is rather unfair and unjust for the borrower to shout about egalitarianism or equality, because it is no more a matter of egalitarianism or equality if the borrower does not pay back what he has borrowed. Equality is not applied when people are in a queue at a bus stop, at a cinema, or at a bank. In this case, inequality is equality; those who have arrived earlier at the queue are

be to be served earlier than those arrive later. Those who studied hard in schools and universities are more likely to get a better job, while those who have received poor marks in schools, colleges or universities cannot argue about equality if they get a less well paid job.

Even in communist society, which is normally characterised as a society of equality, the principle of equality is not kept and cannot be kept properly. In the work place, those who handle their given task more diligently, eagerly, and efficiently and thus perhaps achieve more, are often given the same wage as those who do not.

It is already sufficient with only these examples for us to see that there are far too many areas in our real life in which inequality is an unavoidable and often necessary part of the social order. An absolute equality as is marked in the trinitarian communion of God must be conceived in different perspectives. The difference between God's equality and the equality that can be applied to human society is not a quantitative but a qualitative one. No matter how much effort we may put in, we shall never reach the level or quality of the divine communion. We have already acknowledged that the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that the union of the three Persons is so peculiar and unique to God that it cannot even be described rationally and in human words. There is no point arguing about copying the divine pattern of communion at all, because God's communion is beyond human perception and thus it is difficult to draw any intrinsic and logical link between human and divine socialities. Therefore, the matter of human equality or egalitarianism must be dealt with in isolation from the inner divine communion. Instead of trying to forge such a trinitarian connection as a model for living, a better pattern comes from Jesus' commandment – 'love one another' (John

12:12, 13:34, 15:12), 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31), or 'love your enemy' (Luke 6:27-36) – or the apostolic exhortation of Paul on love (1Cor. 13:1-13) that can be easily adopted as a practical humanitarian principle in our social life.

Strictly speaking, even the triune God's inner relationship as outlined in our theological tradition may not be seen as exactly egalitarian. Jesus himself said, for example, that "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), "that day and hour no one know, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matt.24:36), or "I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me" (John 8:28).²⁵⁹ Moreover, it is almost an incontestable fact that the Spirit does not have as significant a function or authority as does the Father or the Son. First of all, apart from the baptismal prayer in the threefold name of Father, Son and Spirit (Matthew, 28:19), there is no biblical sayings that we should pray to the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Spirit never speaks "on his own authority, but whatever he hears" comes from the Father (John 16:13). He prays for us to the Father (Rome 8:26-27) and despite all activities of the Spirit, it is the Son who receives the glory from the Spirit (John 16:14). The Spirit self-empties for the Father and the Son. At the economic level, it is thus difficult to maintain a total equality between the Trinity. The reality in the inner life of the Trinity may have to be interpreted differently, but anything that we cannot derive from the economic Trinity is inevitably more speculative.

²⁵⁹There are, of course, indications of equality in the New Testament between the Father and the Son, such as that "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and that "All that the Father has is mine" (John 16:15). This, however, cannot completely nullify those biblical statements which suggest a sort of inequality between them.

In this sense, the part of the Eastern view which appears to stress a priority of the Father is not without reason. Zizioulas, a leading vindicator of the Cappadocian theology sees the Father as the cause of the divine being and thus the cause of the Son and Spirit and of the trinitarian communion.²⁶⁰ One reason for this is that, if all the persons of the Trinity were mutual causality, it would be impossible to distinguish one from another.²⁶¹ This means that the “concept of hierarchy . . . inheres in the idea of person”²⁶² and therefore in the Trinity there is “a kind of subordination”.²⁶³ In this connection, Miroslav Volf summarises Zizioulas’ view by stating:

The communion is always constituted and internally structured by an asymmetrical-reciprocal relationship between the one and the many. The asymmetry . . . consists in the many being constituted by the one, whereas the one is only conditioned on the many . . .²⁶⁴

One can say (with Boff and Moltmann), however, that it is fully to be divine for the Son to be obedient to the Father and for the Spirit to self-empty himself in providing the way for us to the Father. Such an inferiority, that the Spirit shows to the

²⁶⁰Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pp. 44-46.

²⁶¹Zizioulas, ‘The Teaching of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Holy Spirit in Historical and ecumenical Perspective,’ in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum* (Vatican: Libretia Editrice Vaticana), p.39, referred to in Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p.79.

²⁶²Zizioulas, ‘Die pneumatologische Dimension,’ p.141, quoted in Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p.78.

²⁶³Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p.89.

²⁶⁴Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp. 78f.

Father is what determines his full divinity.²⁶⁵ Considering this view, then, if we should define what appears to be an inequality – superiority and inferiority – in God as an equality, why do we not also regard what appears to be inequality in our society as equality? This present argument does not purport to deny our traditional belief in the total equality of the Persons of the Trinity. Rather, my point is, firstly, that what seems to be an equality in many parts of our social life in fact may not be called an inequality as the case with the Trinity. Conversely, and secondly, if God's life in relation to us (the economy) has some aspects of inequality, then we accordingly have to accept some aspects of our unequal reality as a necessity or inevitability. Still further, the irresistible question is: why should we try to imitate the inner life of God, which is only speculatively depictable.

A book always reflects a certain political, social, or cultural context in which it is written.²⁶⁶ It is very much the case with Boff's book which contains his heart-renting cry for the oppressed people of the Latin America. We must duly understand what a tragic life the people are living in many parts of the world, especially in the third world. However sympathetic we try to be, it may not be enough to console the people who are actually experiencing the tragedy. Despite all this, however, we cannot be too emotional either, if we want to analyse our theological standpoint correctly. Admittedly, theology can reflect the ideologies of the dominant authorities within the church, and indeed the history of the church bears witness to the fact that theology was often used for the

²⁶⁵Cf. R.Gruenler, The Trinity in the Gospel of John, p.xvii.; M.J.Erickson, God in Three Persons, pp.240f.

²⁶⁶A.MacIntyre, Whose justice? Which Rationality?, pp.373-88.

purpose of such ideologies.²⁶⁷ While it is essential for us to remain sympathetic to the difficult third world situation, on the other hand, we also need to be neutral-minded and cautious so that theology can remain as much as possible a theology and not simply become an ideology. In this present study, we need to consider whether God's sending of Christ and the Holy Spirit purports to make the world a perfect society. Here we confront the kind of tendency that is maintained in Boff's Liberation theology.

Boff's tendency to over-stress the necessity of a social reform of this material world seems to be a problem since such an approach is likely to distort the general tone of the New Testament message. For example, according to the Gospels, Jesus Christ stressed that the kingdom of God does not belong to this world; it is clear that the kingdom is an eschatological one as many of Jesus' parables suggest. Many parables in the Synoptic Gospels warn us about the eschatological age to come: the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30; Mark 4:26-29), the great feast and the wedding garment (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24), the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the faithful and unfaithful servants (Matthew 24:45-51; Luke 12:42-46), the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33) – just to name a few. These parables and many others spur the reader of the Gospels to prepare for the coming kingdom.²⁶⁸ It is also true that there is a considerable amount of ethical content in the Synoptic Gospels, but ethical behaviour is only secondary and interim if compared to the overwhelming emphasis given to

²⁶⁷Cf. T.D.Parker, "The Political Meaning of the Doctrine of the Trinity: Some Theses", *The Journal of Religion*, pp.165-84.

²⁶⁸See D.Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus*.

eschatology; Christian ethics are depicted as little more than preparation or a probation to entering the eschatological kingdom of God. This is evident in the constant antitheses by which the qualities of this material world and the kingdom of heaven are contrasted.

We also find in many parts of the New Testament an anti-material character. The story of Jesus' Passion makes it clear that God's concern is not the establishment of a just and egalitarian society in this world. Such a character is even more apparent when it comes to the Fourth Gospel. This gospel may seem too 'docetic' – as claimed by E. Käseman²⁶⁹ – especially to the eyes of Liberation theologians, but on the whole it is very much in line with the Synoptic Gospels in terms of anti-materialism. Perhaps one may draw a different view from reading verses Acts and James. According to Acts 2:44-47, the Jerusalem Church had what appears to be a systematic communist organisation in which the members of the Christian community shared everything between them; James 1:27 remarks on the virtue of helping the widows and the orphans. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that the Jerusalem Church's communist system was also adopted in other churches, and it is questionable how far the philanthropic pattern of Christian life as mentioned in James was maintained in Christian communities. Perhaps one may also want to appeal to the ethical content of Jesus' teaching on the Mount (Matt. Chs. 5-7). Yet, the underlying purpose of Jesus' ethic exhortations here is dominantly a political defence of the believing community from the misunderstanding and thus potential persecution by the authorities of the Jewish community. In other words, it is the preservation of the believing community, rather than the ethical content itself, that is

²⁶⁹E. Käseman, The Testament of Jesus.

focussed. It seems probable that any ethical content in the New Testament was intended as no more than an interim policy, to prepare the Christian communities for Jesus' second coming.

The overall impression given from the New Testament, especially from such verses as Matthew 24:32-35 ("From the fig tree learn its lesson . . . Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."), is that this present material world is unlikely the place where God fulfills his eventual plan. This is also suggested from the biblical accounts that Jesus' followers, including Peter (Cf. Matthew 16:21-28), misunderstood Jesus as a political leader, until his resurrection from the dead and sending of the Spirit. The material world can never be a perfect society, in contrast to what Boff hopes it to be. Even Jesus' saying, 'love your enemy', may reflect the reality of life in which enemies inevitably exist, and this tells us that this world – as long as there are enemies – is not a perfect one anyway. The fundamental problem with Boff's view is the thought that God's kingdom can be embodied in this world. If this world should be our final destination, then Jesus' second coming becomes insignificant and pointless.

In a practical dimension Boff's liberation theology also has problems. For Boff, as was true for Moltmann, the doctrine of the Trinity is a "social reform programme". One problem concerns the achievability of the social reform he claims. However persuasive his liberation theory may be, it is not so easy to be achieved in real world life as he believes. For example, in the wider society, while there are Christian believers for whom his theological message can effectively function, providing an imperative moral

standard to change their thought and behaviour, there are also a substantial number of non-believers (even in the Latin American societies) for whom the Christian message – whether it be moral or theological imperatives – does not necessarily have a strong appealing force. We cannot oblige these non-believers, against their will, to obey the Christian moral gospel when they have no faith in the Christian God. They should obey their national constitutional laws but there is no legitimate reason why they should also obey a trinitarian inspiration that is hardly supported even by Scripture. In this connection, John Zizioulas' statements below are worth considering.

The Cappadocians have taught us that the Trinity is not a matter for academic speculation, but for personal relationship. As such, it is truth revealed only by participation in the Father-Son through the Spirit which allows us to cry 'Abba, Father'. The Trinity is therefore revealed only in the church, i.e. the community through which we become sons of the Father of Jesus Christ. Outside this it remains a stumbling block and a scandal.²⁷⁰

Admittedly, there are accounts in the Old Testament (such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Hosea, and Amos), which suggest a social reform of the whole society. In these cases, however, the fundamental condition underlying such a social reform is the right relationship between God and the whole nation, his chosen people. Even in these

²⁷⁰J.D. Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of The Holy Spirit: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution', in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, ed. C.Schwöbel, p.60.

accounts we learn that it is the personal relationship between God and his people, now as his new people, the church, that is the fundamental condition for a 'social reform'. We also acknowledge that there have been Christian social movements inspired by social reformers through the ages. But such movements are theoretically possible only when the Christian religion (particularly a single denomination) has an overwhelming influence over the whole country with a largely Christian population, as once was the case in England and perhaps also in South America in the past. Nowadays the increasing tendency is for a country to be divided into many faiths and denominations, all of which makes an upturn of the society by Christian ideologies unrealistic. It is even more true in many other parts of the world. South Korea, for example, is said to have a large Christian population covering roughly one fifth of the whole population.²⁷¹ Though the statistics are impressive compared to the overall Christian influence in the far-Eastern world, even in this society Christian influence over the wider society within the country is extremely limited. All this clearly shows how unrealistic it is to expect the social reform envisaged by Boff to be successful in most parts of the modern world.

Considering all these problems, one fundamental question emerges as to whether sometimes we consciously or unconsciously regard power or authority as essentially an enemy to human freedom. It is almost certain that Boff's claim of a trinitarian modelling for human sociality, especially his ideas of egalitarianism and liberation, is a byproduct of such a presumption. The same can be said of Moltmann's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is true that power often accompanies

²⁷¹This refers to regular church goers, not just those who regard themselves as Christian but do not attend Sunday worship regularly.

oppression of the weak and restriction of human freedom as history shows. Nonetheless, it is not impossible for power and authority to be maintained alongside freedom and love. Thus, criticising Moltmann's tendency to see power and authority necessarily as opposition to free fellowship in the life of the church and the world,²⁷² Richard Bauckham remarks that

He [Moltmann] neglects the inevitability of some kind of power and authority in human society and therefore misses the opportunity to explore the way in which power and authority can be based on consent, exercised in love, and directed to fostering, rather than suppressing, freedom and responsibility.²⁷³

Perhaps a recent film titled *Schindler's List*, based on a true story during the World War II, may provide a good example of the kind of use of authority and power to which Bauckham referring. In the film, a local business German, at the cost of his own social standing and fortune, saves the lives of the Jews who were to be taken to Auschwitz. The film shows, accordingly, that power is not always paired with dominion; on the contrary, it can also be a tool for loving fellowship in human society. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to envisage a community or society in which there is no central authority at all. Such a community or society would be equally perverse to social order and peace, and weaker members in such an anarchical environment would likely be equally, or possibly

²⁷²J.Moltmann, 'The Reconciling Power of the Trinity in the Life of the Church and the World,' in The Reconciling Power of the Trinity, C.E.C. Occasional Paper, 15.

²⁷³R.Bauckham, Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making, p.135.

even more, open to oppression, inequality and other forms of physical and mental threats, than in the community or society where there are some dominant groups with unrestricted power and authority.

In conclusion, as we have seen in our brief examination of the New Testament, Christianity is an eschatological and spiritual religion – unlike some religious groups or sects of the New Religious Movements – and as such we must realise that there are certain limitations in what the Christian church can do to change the wider society. To make a major social reform possible, it is essential for the majority of the people in a society to be evangelised beforehand. Indeed this is in fact what the Christian church should do in this present world. In any case, Jesus' saying that "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21) seems to be a universal truth unbound by any particular time.

The fourth problem in recent trinitarian thought is the tendency to equate the concept of divine person with the concept of human person in general. Why the concept of God's personhood should be dealt with in the same category with human personhood is highly questionable. First we need to look at an example from LaCugna's discussion of the concept of person. Whereas in Moltmann the concept of person is cautiously confined to the concept of divine Person, LaCugna uses the concept of divine Person also to describe the person in general. This means that since God is in communion, human persons are also to be in communion, on the grounds that the true expression of human personhood is found in divine Personhood.²⁷⁴ She says,

²⁷⁴LaCugna, *God For Us*, p.288-292.

God is interactive, neither solitary nor isolated. Human beings are created in the image of the relational God and gradually are being perfected in that image (*the ôsis*), making more and more real the communion of all creatures with one another. The doctrine of the Trinity stresses the relational character of personhood over and against the reduction of personhood to individual self-consciousness, and against the reduction of personhood to a product of social relations. Thus it can serve as a critique of cultural norms of personhood, whether that of “rugged individualism” or “me first” morality, as well as patterns of inequality based on gender, race, ability, and so forth.²⁷⁵

Here LaCugna’s point is against individualism and in favour of the relational concept of personhood. Similarly, Gunton argues that the relational and relative nature of the being of the Trinity leads us to understand the world, as the creation of God.²⁷⁶

LaCugna and Gunton’s point is reasonably clear; they are claiming necessity for a re-conception of human personhood, the true expression of which, as they maintain, is found in the divine personhood. Is this claim justifiable? To put it more precisely, is there necessity for change in the concept of human personhood because our

²⁷⁵Ibid., p.292.

²⁷⁶Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, chapter 8, esp. pp.137-157.

conventional conception (of person as the individual consciousness, for example) is erroneous? Or, is such a fundamental change of our conception possible? If our conception of human person is totally changed, will we not also have to re-construct our mentality in understanding all areas of our culture accordingly, whether it be Christian or non-Christian? If this is the case, do we not also need seriously to think about and to re-define Jesus Christ's coming into the world in a lowly human body, by asking questions even about whether God's sending his Word to the world in a human person, Jesus, was necessary – since we already have the perfect personhood of God in us? Does his coming in such a lowly human form so as to be equalled with other human beings in terms of physical and mental conditions (though he also had a perfect divine mentality), not confirm some truth about our human plight, namely, the confinement of our person being in an individual consciousness, with selfishness and sinfulness within it?

A conspicuous Cappadocian advocate and one of the most influential contemporary theologians on the study of the person is John D. Zizioulas. The common element between his theology and that of LaCugna and Gunton is the Cappadocian concept of the person. In an essay, though, in which Zizioulas expounds Cappadocian trinitarianism, he necessarily contrasts the relationship between the existence of the human being and God. What is different in human existence from divine existence, he argues, is that in the former, nature precedes person and therefore a human person is seen as an individuality independent of and distinguished from other human persons.

Since God by definition has not had a beginning, and space and time do not enter His existence, the three

persons of the Trinity do not share a pre-existing or logically prior to them divine nature, but coincide with it. Multiplicity in God does not involve a division of His nature, as happens with man.²⁷⁷

Unlike LaCugna's and Gunton's, however, Zizioulas' more detailed approach appears to be more frank about the reality of humanity. Zizioulas acknowledges that divine existence is fundamentally different from human existence. On Zizioulas' understanding, it is the personhood that is the image of God; human personhood can become like God only if the human person frees himself from the bondage of the limitations of nature, and directs himself toward the living like God in the dimension of personhood.²⁷⁸

Zizioulas' views of separation of personhood from human nature may appear to make logical sense, yet we cannot simply write off human nature as totally obsolete or evil. Zizioulas may be incidentally equating human nature with 'the desires of the flesh' (Cf. Gal.5:17), but they are not necessarily the same. Human nature itself is *not* sinful but 'the desires of the flesh' *is*. In a practical sense, on his view, the only way for us to become like God is asceticism, and in fact this seems to be the case as he mentions that this is why asceticism was regarded as essential for early Fathers.²⁷⁹ But can asceticism rid a human person of his or her human nature? Zizioulas' view in this particular matter seems to be an over-manipulation of conceptuality. On his view, the

²⁷⁷Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution', in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, p.48.

²⁷⁸Ibid., p.55.

²⁷⁹Ibid., p.56.

humanity which God has given us totally disappears behind the concept of the person. Yet, the fact is that, without my human nature, I would make only a nominal, empty, 'I'.

Certainly, if we follow LaCugna and Gunton's explanation of personhood, we have a quite different story. What LaCugna and Gunton have achieved is simply a discovery of common denominator between the ontology of God and the human being; they are redefining human personhood simply with words and concepts that were used in Cappadocian theology to describe the (inner) being of God. The problem is that, during the process of this redefinition, human personhood is unduly manipulated and drifts away from our more conventional and intelligible concepts, to the extent that the concept of human existence now, in LaCugna and Gunton's theology, becomes what in our concrete life and ordinary situations cannot easily be grasped.

It shall also be noted that there are also other scholars in whom we find considerably different insights in regard to the concept of personhood. Such scholars include W. Kasper²⁸⁰ and Thomas G. Weinandy.²⁸¹ While the latter may not be seen as providing a completely satisfactory alternative to the Eastern view of the person, he does maintain a more readily intelligible concept of personhood than Zizioulas. He remarks that in our post-Lockean and post-Kantian milieu, the use of the term 'person' to be applied to the Father, the Son and the Spirit, "either is inadequate or, worse still, imparts an erroneous connotation," since it would lead to tritheism.²⁸² The implication here is

²⁸⁰W.Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ.

²⁸¹T.G.Weinandy, The Father's Spirit of Sonship.

²⁸²Ibid., p.111.

that, whether or not we acknowledge the precise meaning the original term outlined in the theology of the Greek Fathers, it is a fact that the term, in our modern environment, is inadequate to be applied to the Trinity.²⁸³ Another implication drawn from his essay is that, unlike the view of Zizioulas, 'person' is not only an legitimate term to refer to the human individual but also one that is intrinsically meant to be used to refer to it. There is therefore a substantial difference of concept between Weinandy's understanding and Zizioulas' which sees personhood as fundamentally belonging to divine realm and only to be applied to the human person as a consequence of his or her union with God (through baptism, for instance). Weinandy argues that the difficulty with the issue of person can be solved only by christological insight, that is, by seeing Jesus' humanity as person, 'I'. The point here is not anything such as that Jesus' humanity is the prototype humanity or that we receive our personhood by joining God's personhood in Jesus, as maintained by Zizioulas, but that being a person is being fully human. Thus referring to Jesus' double nature of divinity and humanity, he states:

[Jesus'] human 'I' is that of a divine subject. If the human 'I' is not identified with the divine subject, if the human 'I' only gives personal expression to some impersonal facet or aspect of God's being in the world, it would mean that in the 'incarnation' (the greatest expression of

²⁸³Ibid., p.112. An interesting point Weinandy makes in this connection is that recent rise of trinitarian issues is in fact a product of "human personalism" that was "cultivated and kindled" by contemporary philosophy and psychology. It is ironic that what gave rise to theology of the trinitarian concept of person is none other than metaphysical philosophy and psychology which the theology itself criticises.

God in our midst) God would be less than a person. Only if the Son actually identifies himself with – so as to be ontologically one with – a human ‘I’, does the Son reveal that he is at least equal to our greatest dignity, that is, existing as persons. While we may not fathom the fullness of what it means for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be persons, we know that in the Incarnation the Son is a divine subject or person in a way that is analogous to and compatible with our own dignity as persons or subjects. The Son, as a divine subject, may be more than we are as persons, but he is not less than we are as persons . . .²⁸⁴

Here the underlying fact is that personhood is a hallmark of the human individual, and personhood is not that which originally belongs to God alone and we only share it with him through his grace. In this view, the Son is not incarnated to provide the prototype of personhood, but to lower himself to be compatible with us as person. The modern term person is often the subject of criticism when applied to the Trinity because it denotes a subjective self-consciousness and thus leads to tritheism. But Weinandy sees it differently as he says that the modern concept of person which implies individual subjectivity is “actually an advantage, and not a hindrance” to our understanding of the

²⁸⁴Ibid., p.117.

Trinity, for “the stress on subjectivity better enables us today to grasp that within the inner being of God there are truly three subjects and not three impersonal ‘things’”.²⁸⁵

One fact we should notice is that the language and concept of person outlined by the Cappadocians and interpreted by a number of current theologians appear to be impractical; they are too alien to be applied to our ordinary situations and cultural life. In actual fact, we can never fully know about the being of God because of our human limitation, and that is precisely why the Word had to come to us in the incarnated Jesus. Had Jesus not had been incarnated, we would have had no way of knowing him. Thanks to the incarnated Son and to the work of the Spirit in us, we are enabled to be connected to God; through the Spirit in us we call the Father ‘Abba, Father’. (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:16). Yet we still have all our human nature and limitations. These limitations must surely include our intelligence and cultural bounding, and thus we still legitimately use our cultural language and concepts to describe God whom we worship, though we can describe his essential reality only analogically.²⁸⁶

If it is our destiny that we cannot ever describe God properly, why do we not also keep our existing conventional concepts such as person as the centre of individual consciousness? Suppose that there is a newly founded church in a remote country town. The church is, however, unable to purchase an organ or piano for some financial reason, and finds that there is no way of providing the right tune for the congregation to sing

²⁸⁵Ibid., p.119. This understanding of personhood is largely in line with Kasper. See Kasper, *op.cit.*, pp.155f.

²⁸⁶James B. Torrance, ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity in our contemporary Situation,’ in The Forgotten Trinity, vol.3, p.3.

hymns. Is it not better for someone to bring or lend any musical instrument such as a guitar since it can be of some good use for the time being, rather than, for example, concluding and declaring that the church will not sing hymns until it purchases a proper instrument? When Jesus was in this world, he often taught the disciples and the followers in parables, partly because of the limitations of human mentality and language. Jesus' incarnation is presumably the most effective and practical choice of the way God could provide us to meet him, largely because of human limitation. All this leads to a consideration of the necessity and inevitability for us to make the best use of our common, practical, conventional and cultural language and concepts.

I suspect that the particular view that the image of God imprinted in us is personhood may be a result of an over-exaggeration of a certain partial aspect, such as the social ontology of Cappadocian theology. To be specific, in my view, as indicated earlier, the human person's possession of the 'spirit', rather than 'personhood', fits better the description of the image of God, especially in consideration that it is well supported by the overall impression given by Pauline teachings. Once again, it must be remembered that any attempt to seek an equation between the patterns of divine and human existence needs careful examination. It is only in a certain form of conceptual logic that such an equation is possible; beyond that we can hardly compare God with a human person. If such an equation is allowed uncritically without certain qualifications being considered, it seems that we are going back to the Enlightenment again – the movement marked by a human-centred value of the world. "In the nominalism and scholasticism of the West, we have too often sought to define Christian doctrine and to

subsume God under creaturely categories."²⁸⁷ We have noted earlier that Moltmann treats the concept of divine person separately from the concept of human person. Maybe he is aware of this problem. A more appropriate approach to the study of the personal God must replace the subject titles such as 'the concept of being a person' with something like 'the concept of God's being a person', and deal with the concept of person in general and the concept of God as person separately.

²⁸⁷Ibid., p.5.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Trinitarian thought particularly in the last three decades shows various changes of thought from what has gone before. I have already tried to identify some of the specific changes and attempted to evaluate them from an objective view point. I have also pointed out some of the problems those changes accompany. We now need to conclude where precisely our trinitarian theology stands in a broader picture of modern trinitarian theology, by articulating some pros and cons of recent trinitarian thought.

PROS

1. Theological reshaping

One common element found in many of the recent publications on trinitarian theology is the positive and active attitude towards reshaping trinitarian doctrine. This is highly commendable. One of the reasons for this lies in the unknowability of God. For, despite the fact that we find God himself in Jesus, God remains beyond our perception. The being of God is so mysterious that it is doubtful if anyone can ever fully explain the being of God in human concepts and words. Many recent theologians appear to have a critical view, for example, of Augustine's analogical depiction of God. We need to

remember, however, that Augustine himself acknowledged the mysterious nature of God's being, when he said that "If you can understand it, it's not God!"²⁸⁸ Thus he sought a psychological analogy and wrote in order not to be silent. Many criticisms against him are legitimate, though we must not forget that he only *tried* to understand and articulate what God is like. On the other hand, many theologians today highly regard the theological achievements of Cappadocian Fathers in drawing out what God is. Importantly, however, Gregory of Nazianzus also acknowledged that he did not know what 'begotten' and 'procession' meant but that he felt forced to use the terms simply because there were no better words to describe the relation between the Word, the Spirit and the Father.²⁸⁹ Both Augustine and the Cappadocians tried the same thing, but logically speaking, neither of their depiction of God could have been as perfect as God himself. It is, therefore, faith and accompanying spiritual experience, not human mentality, that is the route through which God is met and experienced. Despite all this, it is yet the responsibility and task of theologians to articulate, in words and concepts (however inadequate they may be), the being of God and our experience of him in our worshipping life. Reshaping our theological understanding of God must remain open from generation to generation. In purely scientific terms, "when the forms of life and thought making an apprehension of God plausible shift, the apprehension itself becomes questionable."²⁹⁰ It is possible that the understanding and the concepts of the theology

²⁸⁸Quoted in A.E.McGrath, Understanding The Trinity, p.9.

²⁸⁹Gregory of Nazianzus, "Fifth Oration on the Holy Spirit", Theological Orations, trans. from The Christology of the Later Fathers, ed. E.R.Hardy, pp.198f.

²⁹⁰Parker, op.cit., p.167.

formulated in the past may not be perceived precisely the same in our present cultural environment. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to change them to suit better our modern mentality. This does not mean a change of religious truth, but simply a change of the way to describe the same thing in order to make it more intelligible. In view of this, the positive attitude of recent theologians to reshape our trinitarianism inherited is encouraging.

2. Range: the doctrine of the Trinity as related to other doctrines

Another positive aspect of recent trinitarian theology is the interest and continuous endeavour of theologians to make trinitarian theology more connected with other areas of theology and doctrines than it was before. Theologians today do not regard the doctrine of the Trinity as an isolated, confined, or closed doctrine. On the contrary, they try to view the doctrine in a broad frame, consciously seeking whether it fits with other doctrines. Barth's revolutionary attempt of putting the doctrine as a prologue at the beginning of his many volumes, and Schleiermacher's indifferent gesture of putting it at the end of his book as an appendix, are now seem to be a long gone conflict of the past. The doctrine of the Trinity is not now regarded as a closed or secluded doctrine. Instead, the conventional system of doing theology by dealing with the doctrine of God and doctrine of the Trinity separately is largely rejected, because "the doctrine of the Trinity simply *is* the Christian doctrine of God. Accordingly, any doctrine of God which has ceased to be trinitarian in character has thereby ceased to be Christian."²⁹¹ Further,

²⁹¹N.Lash, "Considering the Trinity", in *Modern Theology*, 2, (1986), p.183.

it is widely agreed that the trinitarian doctrine needs to be connected and confirmed by other areas of theology.

3. Practicality: personal God and practical worshipping life.

Another contribution of recent trinitarian theology is the atmosphere it produces in stressing the personal character of God rather than, for example, a supreme substance. One immediate consequence that can be expected is a vitalisation of the worshipping life of the church. The current interest in, and reiterated discussions of, personhood of God brings him much more closer to individual believers. In this situation, God is no longer an unreachable substance or emotionless authoritarian: he is a person, just as we are persons, who responds to us and with whom we can talk and share thought. One of the Old Testament books, Hosea, in which God and Israel are depicted as a man and his unfaithful wife, is a noteworthy example of biblical understanding of personal God, while the personal character of God is also obvious in the New Testament, such as in Matthew 7:9-11 where the relationship between God and human beings is described as that between a parent and children ("if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?"), an approach amply confirmed in the fact that God confronted human beings in the incarnated Christ. Such a view of God makes our worship practical and serious. In worship, while we praise and pray to a real and living person, formalism recedes. In fact, as discussed earlier, the concept of personhood has various problems. The concept, for example, can be abstract and philosophically speculative; if we read too much into personhood, we may find God a practically unreachable being. However we see the details of recent theological thought and whatever the exact definition of personhood

may be, the fact remains that the prevailing tendency to depict God as a person (or an individual person) has the effect of shaping our perception of God as a conversable God, or an intimate friend, in our ordinary worshipping life. Consequently, the interests of current trinitarian theology can be seen as making an important contribution to the practical worshipping life of the church, and this appears to be in line with LaCugna's remark: "The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life."²⁹²

4. Interest in the rest of the world

The doctrine of the Trinity in recent years encourages the Christian believer and the church to an open mind towards the wider world. This stems from its claim that being is constituted in its relationality to other beings; thus one being is intrinsically related to another. This principle also explains our essential relation to God, namely that God is related to us as an 'other'. On this view, the individual believer and the church are not on their own; they are also connected with people outside the church and, further, with the rest of the world. All this turns the concern of the believing community towards the wider society and the world. The result is discouragement of individualism and exclusivism, and development of Christian ethics based on egalitarianism and humanitarianism. The effect of recent trinitarian theology, which leads us to view the whole world compassionately as family, is therefore highly contributive to the peace of the world, in various situations of our life, whether it be merely inter-personal or inter-

²⁹²LaCugna, *God for Us*, p.1.

national. One obvious merit of this view is that we are encouraged, for example, to consider the weak members of our society as related to ourselves, and so treat them as being our family members and provide them with what they lack. Further, as Gunton maintains, the material environment, such as the nature, is to be regarded not as alien to ourselves any longer. On the contrary, we are to love our natural environment and preserve it as beautiful as possible. Nature, then, will repay to us what we have given it. This type of trinitarian thought, however, does not come cheap, however, because there is a danger of dilution of the central Christian gospel. As mentioned previously, indiscriminate and unqualified inclusion of the world as one family may overlook the fact that it is the faith of the individual person and salvation of his or her soul (or spirit) that is the primal concern of God in his relation to us. Moreover, such an inclusivism of the world as claimed by some theologians can be understood as purely grounded on egalitarian and humanitarian principles, rather than evangelism. Despite these potential problems accompanying the treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in recent years, it is nonetheless true that the current trinitarian thought has an enormously positive element for the development of modern Christian ethics.

5. Ecumenism in trinitarian thought

The doctrine of the Trinity today is seen as an ecumenical doctrine. It is mainly for the same reason as is the case with the inclusive view of the world discussed above, namely that all beings, both human and non-human and Christian and non-Christian, are related to one another. On this view, there is no particular reason why churches with different theological traditions cannot be united, as long as they believe in and worship the same

God. Consequently, theologians are being led to open their minds and become more ready to listen to what other churches and schools have to say, and to accept a theological compromise by which they can be united. While, there are potential problems with such a movement – because uniformity of faith can eventually grow into a political authority by which some minority can be met with bias – the recent ecumenism born of trinitarian thought is rightly to be appreciated. Ecumenical unity has always been a great hope for the church ever since the early church. Various attempts to seek a convergence by frequent discussions held between the East and the West, over the issues of the Filioque and the personhood, are therefore seen as an encouraging step for the theological union of the Christian church in the future, and this is reflected in the different denominations of our four writers.

CONS

1. Human-centred theology

Despite all these positive contributions, there are also a few negative elements which it carries. One such is the development of a human-centred theology. In recent trinitarian theology, human existence is described as a far more influential factor, than it was in the past, for the reality of God. Thus it can even be said that the human being is an essential part of the constitution of God, as seems to be the case with Moltmann. Even if we do not go as far as Moltmann's position, the overwhelming tone in recent trinitarian theology is to explain God from a human point of view. This was the tendency predominant in the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and especially in the various types

of Liberal theology of the early twentieth century, which Barth resisted by his *Theology of the Word*, stressing divine transcendence. Such a tendency seems still existent and even reviving in the thought of many trinitarian theologians today. The newly arising interest in and re-evaluation of the Cappadocian concept of person appears to give a decisive impetus to that tendency. If Cappadocian theology is concentrated in isolation from other theological areas such as soteriology and pneumatology, the outcome can be greatly misleading.

For example, Zizioulas has claimed that the human person can “amount to becoming God”.²⁹³ One potential effect of this claim is to make his reader think as if God can be contained in a certain category, as if there is some kind of limitation in God's being, and as if human beings can be even levelled with him if they acquire a certain qualification common with God, which is potentially within their reach. Consequently, sometimes God can be conceived merely as a partner, who is slightly superior to human beings for now but will eventually be equalled by human beings in the future through the ultimate elevation of the status of the human being. Surely, this is not precisely what Zizioulas and others wish to claim. But such a misunderstanding is not impossible due to the nature of the theme and the way they make their theological claims.

Perhaps the responsibility for this problem lies with the term ‘person’ that we use. The English word ‘person’ is inadequate to describe what the Greek fathers intended to mean by *hypostasis* (or *persona* in Latin). If this is the case, in order to avoid misunderstanding, the term ‘person’ should not be use at all in certain situations where

²⁹³Zizioulas, ‘The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution’, in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, p.55.

it is to be distinguished from the conventional concept of 'individual person', which denotes an individual centre of consciousness. Alternatively, the Greek *hypostasis* itself could be used instead of the plain 'person'. The merits of this option are, firstly, that the Greek word would eliminate the danger of incidental confusions that can be caused by repeated use of the modern English word 'person'. Secondly, while there is, presumably, few theological academics who do not know what *hypostasis* is meant to denote; every time the term appears in theological works, it will simultaneously remind the reader of the way the term and its concept were shaped in the early churches and in the history of the church.

Whether or not this suggestion may be worthwhile, this is not the main point. The important thing is that trinitarian theology in recent years, particularly by the emergence of new interests in the Cappadocian concept of the person, has had an ill-effect in elevating human existence to a level on which the human being can be compared to the divine being. This may be due to carelessness in using language which has already been proved inappropriate. It is also possible that writers such as Zizioulas simply wished to see human reality much more positively and optimistically evaluated than it was traditionally described. There are many other examples of human-centred treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. To confine examples to the four writers, these include Moltmann's Process view of God's essential Trinity as being determined by his interaction with human beings; Gunton's tendency to prove (or confirm) divine reality by human and natural sciences and philosophical cosmology; and Boff's delineation of the actualisation of egalitarian human society as the ultimate goal of divine purpose. An obvious consequence of this recent theological tendency, with the emphasis on human

esteem, freedom, and divinisation, is the tendency to shift Christianity to a religion of morality. This betrays the fact depicted in the New Testament (including Acts, Romans and Galatians) of how desperate human existence would have been but for the grace of God. Moreover, it ignores the overtones of biblical statements such as Jesus', who even after lowering himself into humanity still said: "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world" (John 8:23), while it does not sufficiently take into account of the fact that it is purely by the work of the Spirit dwelling in us that we, though fundamentally undeserved, are enabled to join in the divine fellowship.

2. Lack of emphasis on the role of the Spirit.

Again, it appears that recent trinitarian theology, particularly where the concept of person and the image of God are united, the decisive role of the Spirit who is the direct agent of changing our human destiny, is considerably ignored. It is stressed by recent trinitarian studies that we as persons are the image of God and that we are thus, in effect, told to awaken our personhood and vitalise it so that we can participate in the fellowship of the triune God. But how? We are given no sufficient account of how concretely to make our personhood stand out from our present being. Zizioulas, for example, says that it is eucharist and baptism through which we are united with God.²⁹⁴ It is difficult, however, to believe that mere rituals can make our human existence totally changed, without any specific work of a divine being involved in the process. According to the messages about the Paraclete in John's Gospel, the Pentecostal event and the consequent

²⁹⁴See Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp.88-91, 97-102.

missionary works of the disciples described in Acts, and the teachings about the Spirit, the human situation, and the church as the body of Christ, in Pauline epistles (such as Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians), we are given a reasonably clear picture of how our human plight and status are changed. In other words, in spite of a desperate human situation created by inherent human sinfulness, we are not left alone; it is precisely the Spirit, through whom we no longer abide in the sinfulness of human nature, and by whom we are united to Christ and the Father. It is specifically the work of the Spirit who makes us the children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. In this sense, the Spirit is the actual and direct agent of human divinisation. How crucial a function the Spirit has for our worshipping life and our knowledge of God can hardly be more stressed than what Paul said about the Spirit: "God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 2: 10-11) Despite all this fact, such a crucial role of the Spirit appears largely unconsidered, and its place at the immanent level left relatively ambiguous in many recent theological works on the Trinity. In an extreme sense, the Spirit can be seen somewhat redundant in the Godhead, since, according to the general impression given, what is supposedly his specific work is done by the Trinity as a whole.

3. Lack of spirituality

Recent treatments of the doctrine of the Trinity also appear lacking elements of spirituality. A substantial portion of recent theological works are in one way or another

concerned with sociality, relationality, communion, and personhood. Accordingly, there is relatively little space left for spirituality. Admittedly, spirituality itself may seem too vague a term. What I mean is that recent theology does not sufficiently deal with matters such as the relation between personhood and the human spirit (or soul). The New Testament frequently talks about the spirit and teaches us that it is the spirit, not the human body, nor personhood in particular, that is to be saved, and blessed by God, and to be living with God in his kingdom. However, what is envisaged in recent trinitarian theology is that it is the personhood, and not any other element, that is to be redeemed by God. As far as I can see, Scripture never says a single word about personhood and, and therefore there is no mention of the relation between the person and spirit nor the relation between God's personhood and human personhood. Consequently, it is very difficult to understand many parts of recent treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of biblical teaching. In fact, personhood and spirit must have some close connection, and theologians would have to say at least something about it. Nonetheless, the actual fact is that human spirit is seen as hardly of any importance in trinitarian theology. The result is an indifference to the human spirit, and therefore the loss of spirituality in our worshipping life. Perhaps doxology, in particular, may be seen as belonging to the category spirituality, and certainly it is dealt with as such in the works of all of the four theologians we have examined. But there is a serious limitation to what the theology of doxology, that is, the confession of our faith in the trinitarian God, can offer to guide our practical daily Christian living. We also need – to name only a few examples – to repent of our sins, ask for consolation for our troubled heart, healing of our sicknesses, daily and general guidance, authority and power in our ordinary and

missionary life, and thank God for what he has given and will give for our life. Contemporary trinitarian theology does not provide practical and sufficient guidelines, direct or indirect, about what to do in such situations. Perhaps one may argue that these are not the main concern of the doctrine of the Trinity. The point is, however, that discussions about personhood seems to be of little help in many concrete situations of the life of the believer. On the contrary, if the focus were on spirit or soul rather than personhood, the outcome would be considerably different, and would make trinitarian theology connected with many other areas of theology. The doctrine of the Trinity would then become truly "a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life."

4. Lack of evangelism

Recent trinitarian studies also fail to give a proper weight to evangelism. Human communion is one of the major themes in current trinitarianism. This human communion is depicted, however, as achievable not by anything such as evangelism, but mainly on sociological and political bases. It seems that the place where, in traditional theological thought, evangelism should normally be found has now been taken up by the human communion of a largely sociological and theoretical nature.

Scripture, on the other hand, reveals a very different story. Nowhere in the Old Testament is the importance of human communion spoken of in fundamentally egalitarian social terms, in contrast to the kind of trinitarian communion that some theologians wish to draw. One predominant implication given throughout the Old Testament is that being God's people meant being in a united community, and it was the right relationship with God that determined this unitedness. It was taken for granted to

characterise those who were not members of the people of God, Israel, as ones who did not worship God and live in his guidance; they were ignored and deserted by God and were often subject to his wrath. The conclusion we can induce from this is that being part of the people of God is a prerequisite to being part of the united community of God, to which the concept of a trinitarian communion can be applied. Converted to modern terms, it is fundamentally faith in God that brings forth human communion. Theoretically, this means that bringing people outside the church into faith is a decisive way of enlarging and consolidating a perfectly harmonised community. In this sense, what can be more important and urgent than evangelism?

In the New Testament, evangelism cannot be more emphasised. Whereas in the Old Testament, the people of God was a strictly exclusive community. But, with the coming of Jesus to this world, all those who believe in him, whether Jews or gentiles, are entitled to join in the people of God as children of God. One thoroughgoing theme in the New Testament is evangelisation of the world. Jesus himself was the witness to God and his life on earth was predominantly a life of evangelism. Thus Matthew's Gospel, for example, concludes Jesus' command to his disciples to "make disciples of all nations," baptising them and teaching them to observe his commandments (Matt.28:18-20). Similarly, one dominant impression given by the early church's mission delineated in Acts and the teachings of Pauline epistles, is eschatological imminency and thus urgency of evangelism.

The implication given from this simple observation of the Bible is that establishment of perfect human communion is possible fundamentally through our faith in God, and not through imitation or emulation of his divine life. Faith is the

constitutional essence of the community of God, and the administrative agent of this community is the Holy Spirit, who witnesses to the Son and connects us to the Father. Recent trinitarian studies, however, often miss out this point. They simply concentrate on, for example, what a human person already has, that is, personhood, which is the key for participating in the communion of the people of God. The result is that evangelism becomes only secondary and there is no boundary which distinguishes Christians and non-Christians.

5. Danger of compromise of Christian beliefs

Lastly, in contemporary trinitarian theology there appears to be an increasingly growing tendency to compromise certain theological views between different traditions and schools. Although this can be seen as a positive sign on the one, it can also bring some negative results on the other hand. Today is an era of communication – thanks to modern high technology. Information travels faster across the world than any historical period in the past, and the world is becoming increasingly small. This also means a growing awareness amongst theologians that the distance between churches, traditions, and denominations is getting rapidly reduced. What is noticeable as a result is an increasing uniformity of thought. But diversity of thought is not essentially an enemy to Christianity, and does not necessarily causes a fatal harm to Christian faith as a whole. We all know that even within the New Testament the faith in the same God is expressed slightly differently by different writers. For example, there are some differences in the ways of describing the same Jesus between the Synoptic evangelists, the writer of the Fourth Gospel, Paul, and others. Nonetheless, the differences do not point to different

Gods; on the contrary, they together make a consistent witness to God in a broader picture. In fact, uniformity can be as destructive as uncontrolled diversity. Remember how the uniformity of faith for many centuries since the time of Constantine resulted in many ill consequences, particularly shown by the merciless reactions against heretics and by the political uses of clerical authority in historic Christendom. Although we should acknowledge the elements of contribution made by the earlier churches, especially in regard to the survival of the Christian church in times of suffering and the danger of demise, we must also learn lessons from the negative consequences of uniformity. Pressure for compromise itself must be critically faced. Moderation must not suppress honest feelings about certain forms of theological thought, just as much as one-sided thought needs to be watched by moderated and neutral viewpoints. Theologians today and in the future need to be free from too much pressure towards compromise and uniformity.

In conclusion, trinitarian theology in recent years has made some remarkable developments notably through vitalisation of relational and social concepts of being. Nonetheless, this speedy development also discloses various problems and defects that it carries with it. One such is the tendency to attempt to explain the human being and human conditions in isolation from soteriological considerations. A couple of concluding propositions may clarify my meaning here. Firstly, communion with the trinitarian God is possible primarily on the basis of God's redemption and our humble recognition and acceptance of this salvation in faith, on which Scripture places its emphasis consistently. LaCugna declares that "for Christian theology the mystery of God

can be thought of only in terms of the mystery of grace and redemption."²⁹⁵ Beyond this, therefore, we only speculate. Secondly, the doctrine of the Trinity needs to be developed thoroughly on biblical premises, the primary source on which we should rely on every matter in Christian theology.²⁹⁶ These two suggestions alone will not be able to keep us from all theological mistakes we may make. Yet they will keep us from major theological conceptual deviations.

God is the Trinity: God is the Father who sends us his only Son to die for us, God is the Son who identifies himself with us and gives his life to us, and God is the Spirit who abides in us, enables us to abide in the Son and come to the Father, and is the subject of our fellowship in God. No human potential, no human knowledge itself is capable of making us one with God. It is the concrete acts of the Trinity and our response to him in faith that actualise us in our individual diversity to be one with him and with one another now and for ever.

²⁹⁵LaCugna, *God For Us*, p.1.

²⁹⁶It is worth mentioning that these two points have a close connection with two of the main principles of Calvin's theological approach. He never was a prominent trinitarian theologian, but his trinitarian views were remarkably near the Nicene and Eastern position. See P.W. Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response-Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship*.

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