

TRINITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Declan Marmion

TWO GENERATIONS AGO, TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY seemed abstract and incomprehensible. Pastors rarely relished the prospect of preaching on Trinity Sunday. Indeed, most Christians remained straightforward monotheists and simply prayed to 'God'. That there were three persons in this one God made no difference to their spiritual lives. Today, however, the theological scene is quite different. There has been a renewal of theological interest in the Trinity. This can be traced back to two giants of twentieth century theology: Karl Rahner and Karl Barth.

Rahner was reacting to a rather unimaginative and rigid neo-scholasticism that presented the theology of the Trinity in a predominantly speculative and abstract fashion. It encouraged an excessive focus on the inner life and oneness of God (the immanent Trinity) largely disconnected from the spirituality and faith of believers. Rahner led the way out of this impasse by insisting that the starting-point of trinitarian theology should be the experience of the triune God in the history of salvation.¹ Ultimately, the Trinity is a mystery of *salvific revelation*, not some abstract piece of speculation. Rahner's approach was to move away from speculation about God's inner being, and instead to see the doctrine of the Trinity as something implicit in the heart of the Christian message: God's real involvement with the world. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms God's intimate communion with us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Any statement about the nature of God, he maintained, must be rooted in the reality of salvation history. Thus God's saving activity through Jesus Christ and the Spirit (the economic Trinity) truly expresses what God is already 'in Godself' (the immanent or transcendent Trinity). Rahner summed

¹ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1998 [1965]).

up this approach in his pithy axiom: 'The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and vice versa'.²

Barth also departed from traditional approaches to trinitarian theology. He insisted that the doctrine of the Trinity is the key to understanding the Christian concept of revelation.³ He refused to begin with some general doctrine of God or of ultimate Being abstracted from the concrete particularity of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Neither did he support any form of natural theology that looked for traces or analogies of the Trinity in nature or in the human person. The fallen human person is unable to point to God, Barth maintained; such approaches were too anthropocentric, mere projections of human reason. It is only biblical revelation that can provide an authentic grounding for the doctrine of the Trinity.

Rahner and Barth are at one in stressing the personal aspect of the triune self-communication of God. At the same time, both are at pains to acknowledge the transcendent mystery of God, something that exceeds but is not diminished by God's self-expression in history. It would be wrong, therefore, to dissolve the immanent into the economic Trinity. The challenge is to affirm a God who is both related to creation and distinct from it. At issue is the paradox between God's self-disclosure in history and in Scripture on the one hand, and God's ineffable mystery beyond our comprehension on the other.⁴

Though Rahner and Barth differed in their accounts of reason and revelation, they were at one in rejecting the classical Western approach to trinitarian theology in so far as it drew uncritically on what was called the psychological analogy. Associated primarily with Augustine, and later developed by Aquinas and by Lonergan, the psychological analogy is based on the *imago Dei*—the human person is

² Rahner, *The Trinity*, 21-23. For a necessary nuancing of the axiom, see Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (London: SCM, 1983 [1982]), 273-277. Kasper points out that the Trinity in salvation history should not be seen as merely the temporal appearance of the eternal immanent Trinity. On the contrary, one must acknowledge that something new happens to God in the incarnation, that is, that through the incarnation the second divine Person exists in history in a new way. Nor should the immanent Trinity be dissolved in the economic Trinity of salvation history. Nor can we deduce the immanent Trinity by a kind of extrapolation from the economic Trinity.

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975 [1932]), 295-384.

⁴ As Barth puts it, where there is an unveiling (revelation) there is also a veiling: *Church Dogmatics*, 2/1 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957 [1940]), 55.



The Trinity, by Lukas Cranach

made in the triune God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). On this basis it is not unreasonable to seek some reflection of the Trinity in the human person.⁵ He located the image in the human mind and heart. A key Scriptural text for Augustine here is 1 Corinthians 13:12: 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face'.

Both in his *Confessions* and more explicitly in the *De trinitate*, Augustine explored the history of the image of God in us, the history of humanity's fall and redemption, of the defacement and the restoration of the divine image. The first part of his work explored the scriptural basis for the equality of all

three Persons of the Trinity, and the purpose of the sending of the Son and Spirit. For Augustine, the purpose of the sending or the 'missions' of the Son and Spirit is to lead human persons back to the Father. Participation in divine life represents the ultimate fulfilment for which we are created. Later in this work, Augustine moved from the interpretation of Scripture towards presenting the content of trinitarian faith 'in a more inward way'. This 'more inward way', the way of returning into oneself and looking for God within, represents Augustine's psychological approach to the Trinity.⁶ There are three activities within us—being, knowing and willing—which are truly distinct from each other, and yet exist within the oneness of our being. They provide us with an analogy for the unfathomable life of the triune

⁵ Augustine, *De trinitate*, books 9 and 10.

⁶ Augustine, *De trinitate*, book 11.

God. It is not just a matter of discovering a trinitarian image of God in the human mind, however. Augustine saw the Christian vocation as a seeking or yearning for God; and for him the only way to find God was to become truly like the Father, Son and Spirit. All of the divine Persons are actively involved in reintegrating this image in us, an image that has been distorted by sin. For Augustine, then, all reflection on the Trinity is inseparably connected with spiritual growth and sanctification.

Despite the originality and creativity of Augustine's approach, the psychological analogy has fallen out of favour in contemporary theology.⁷ The analogy which Augustine draws between the Trinity and the individual who is remembering, understanding, and loving, has been criticized on the ground that it encourages too individualistic and introspective a view of what it is to be human and thus ultimately of what it is to be God.⁸ In fairness to Augustine, however, he saw the highest human trinity *not* in the human mind's remembering, understanding and loving itself, but in its remembering, understanding and loving God. Indeed, Augustine stressed that Father, Son and Spirit are words indicating relationship. Moreover, he had difficulty with the term 'Person' as applied to the Trinity, since this tended to be understood as an individual human being, and thus undermined our sense of the divine Persons as inseparable.

Augustine's emphasis was on the equality of all three Persons of the Trinity, or on what he described as the unity of the divine essence. Yet his analysis of the individual soul as an image of the Trinity, though serving as a basis of individual piety and for the soul's journey towards God, proved less helpful for more communally-based spiritualities where interpersonal relations and social structures play a decisive role.

⁷ This assessment does not take place neatly along confessional lines. Balthasar, for example, rejects the psychological analogy in favour of the paschal mystery as the true basis for understanding the Trinity. See his *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, translated by Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1990 [1969]). Rahner too offers only cautious approval of the psychological analogy, insisting that it is a *theologoumenon* rather than a doctrine of the Church, and points out that its practical implications remain obscure (Rahner, *The Trinity*, 115-120).

⁸ Colin E. Gunton, 'Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West', in his *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 31-57. For a critical response to Gunton, see Neil Ormerod, 'Augustine and the Trinity: Whose Crisis?' *Pacifica*, 16 (2003), 17-32. Barth himself viewed the psychological analogy as an unwarranted projection of human categories on to the divine. For him it is a desperate attempt to make the knowledge of God a human work. Barth's consistent emphasis is that God becomes knowable not by means of some speculative philosophical project, but only through God's self-disclosure and our participation in this.

By contrast, recent writing on trinitarian theology tends to underscore the relationality of the triune God, a relationality that is not self-contained but overflows into the economy of creation and redemption. Further, the Trinity is presented as a paradigm for relations within the community life of the Church as well as for political and social life. By taking such an approach theologians have tried to overcome the limitations of the psychological analogy.⁹ They have explored how the doctrine of the Trinity can be a more practical doctrine by insisting that the life of God does not belong to God alone, but is a life into which we are drawn. This notion of participation in the divine life is of course typically Augustinian, but it is only comparatively recently that its political, social and ecclesial implications have been more fully teased out.

Political and Feminist Developments

In the attempt to draw connections between trinitarian theology and social and political structures, two of the leading figures have been the theologians Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff.¹⁰ Moltmann's claim, 'the Trinity is our social programme', reflects his conviction that the Trinity is the exemplar of true human community, both in the Church and in society. Since the Trinity is a mutually loving and interacting community, it can serve as a proper paradigm for human society, and inspire us to move beyond false ideas of God and of the Church. For Moltmann, the triune God is reflected in a Christian community, where the abuse of power and unbridled individualism give way to a more relational way of life inspired by the doctrine of the Trinity. As we move beyond egoism and self-interest, we cease to accept an excessively monotheistic view of God. A strictly monotheistic notion of the great universal monarch in heaven, uncritically presented, has all too easily provided archetypes for divine patriarchs on earth. The

⁹ Anne Hunt, 'Psychological Analogy and Paschal Mystery in Trinitarian Theology', *Theological Studies*, 59 (1998), 197-218. See also Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 81-109.

¹⁰ For Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity, see *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, translated by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1981 [1980]), and *History and the Triune God*, translated by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1991). For Boff, see his *Trinity and Society*, translated by Paul Burns (London: Burns and Oates, 1988 [1987]).

idea of the Trinity as social in nature is a salutary corrective to such monarchical, imperial and authoritarian ideas of God. A truly Christian monotheism, therefore, will not speak of monotheism as if it meant oneness only. The unity of God is a unity-in-trinity.

While it would be unwise, I think, to draw direct parallels between theological positions and political theories, the doctrine of the Trinity does point us in the right direction. Correctly understood, it puts an end to any theology that serves as an ideology to justify relations of domination, in which an individual or a group tries to impose its ideas and interests to the exclusion of others. We cannot simply identify this movement towards community with particular political programmes, whether left-wing or right-wing; but it is nevertheless a human and political reality that reflects a communion existing in God. To live out the mystery of the Trinity leads not to an introverted spirituality but to a mirroring of this divine love in social responsibility and in the building of community.

Theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine LaCugna, Sarah Coakley and Janet Soskice have also voiced concerns about how a non-trinitarian theology of God as a self-sufficient and masculine Father paves the way for various kinds of gender-freighted idolatry and ideology.¹¹ Their persistent criticism is that the doctrine has been used



The Trinity by Hildegard of Bingen

¹¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 191-245; Sarah Coakley, 'Living into the Mystery of the Holy Trinity: Trinity, Prayer, and Sexuality', *Anglican Theological Review*, 80 (1996), 223-232; Janet Martin Soskice, 'Trinity and the "Feminine Other"', *New Blackfriars*, 75 (1994), 2-17; 'Trinity and Feminism', in *The*

to reinforce hierarchy and to underscore the maleness of God. Traditional ways of speaking about God have contributed to the downgrading of women in Church and society. Even if not consciously intended, sexist God-language, or the careless use of exclusively male imagery for God, undermines our sense of the equality of women as human beings made in the divine image and likeness. We are back to the depiction of God according to the pattern of an earthly monarch who rules over his subjects.

Discarding the centuries-old Father-language of prayer and worship, however, is unlikely to solve the issue completely. We need rather to acknowledge the limitations and the allusive nature of language about God while taking on board the feminist insistence that God transcends all images, words and concepts. Despite attempts in such a spirit to insist on the sheer otherness of God, and to stress the equality of the Persons, the impression persists that the Father is always accorded a status superior to the other two Persons, with the Holy Spirit a distant third. Thus the Trinity continues to appear both hierarchical and male.

Some have sought to meet these difficulties by replacing the gendered language of 'Father, Son and Spirit' with the more neutral 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer'—terms that express what God does for us rather than anything about the eternal mutuality of the Trinity. But even feminist theologians recognise that an important truth is being obscured here: all three Persons are active in God's creating, redeeming and sanctifying.¹² Another unsatisfactory strategy has been to present the Spirit as the maternal face of God—nurturing, bringing to life, instructing, and so on, as if the Father and the Son were not also maternal. This approach can unwittingly endorse a particular stereotype of the feminine; it leaves the Father and Son simply as masculine figures; it leaves the Spirit all too subordinate at least to the Father—who remains the 'cause' or 'source' of the other two Persons—and also (if the *filioque* clause of the Creed is accepted) to the Son. It is

Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology, edited by Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 135-150.

¹² For an emphasis on the maternal functions of the Spirit, see Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, translated by David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983 [1979]), volume 3, 155-164. For a critical reaction to this approach and an attempt to use mainly female symbolism for God, see Johnson, *She Who Is*, 42-57.

always a mistake to read literally the gendered images we inherit from tradition in connection with the Persons of the Trinity.

Trinity, Postmodernity, and the Turn towards Intersubjectivity

With the advent of postmodernity, many traditional theological assumptions and tendencies have been undermined. Postmodern critiques have highlighted the inadequate, if not idolatrous, nature of language about God, and have advocated a more tentative and apophatic way of speaking of the divine.¹³ They have also stressed the historically situated, contextual, and ideological character of knowledge, and have been sceptical of any metanarrative purporting to offer a secure and certain foundation for knowledge of reality. Even the more constructive postmodern approaches thus advocate a fluid style of theological thinking, and shun attempts to construct any overarching theoretical system. In short, the postmodern vision is both elusive and fragmentary, characterized by ambiguity and pluralism. The centre does not hold, either because there is no centre, or else because there are too many centres, of which the Western cultural version is but one.

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Such ideas have led to a re-evaluation of the philosophical assumptions underlying traditional trinitarian theology. One assumption, going back to Aristotle, gave priority to the essence or substance of a thing—regarded as unchanging—to the detriment of its relational characteristics, which were considered secondary, accidental and transitory. Relational characteristics were not seen as essential to defining or knowing what that thing was. Within trinitarian theology, the effect was a highlighting of the substance or nature of God, and hence of the divine unity.

For Aristotle, the doctrine of monarchy, that is, of a single ruler and a single origin, was both a political and a metaphysical programme.¹⁴ The doctrine would later be more fully advanced by Plotinus, who emphasized the priority of the One as the transcendent cause of all things, a world-view which would inform the trinitarian and christological doctrines in the fourth century.

¹³ For a good introduction to the theme, see Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 1-38.

¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 192-202.

Much contemporary trinitarian theology—one thinks of figures such as Walter Kasper, Catherine LaCugna, John Zizioulas and Colin Gunton—challenges this assumption. It suggests instead that the doctrine of God's trinity, of God as primordially a being of Persons in communion, implies or presupposes that the fundamental category of reality is that of relation.¹⁵ Such relational language is not new. Augustine spoke about relations in God that are not accidental, while Aquinas described the Persons in God as subsistent relations. Despite these ancient pointers towards a social or trinitarian ontology, the theology of the Trinity in the West has nevertheless persisted with a unitary conception of the deity. Under the influence of a distorted understanding of rationality, prevalent in both antiquity and modernity, the tendency has been to think of individual entities who *have* relations or who *enter into* relations, rather than about relations which just *are*—the challenge of the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus a genuinely trinitarian understanding of God may provide a stimulus for renewal. God is not an absolute monad characterized by self-sufficiency, by isolation, and by an inability to engage with the creature.

Drawing on insights from the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers,¹⁶ contemporary trinitarian theology conceives the unity of God in terms of a relational bond between the divine Persons, rather than in terms of divine nature or substance. While Greek Neo-Platonic philosophy emphasized the 'one' over the 'many', the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers claimed that God exists simultaneously as both. The ontological monism of Greek philosophy, despite its wonderful vision of a unified world of harmony and reason, ultimately issued in a fatalistic anthropology. The partial exists for the sake of the total, the person for the 'cosmos'. The person is a 'mask'—something that is

¹⁵ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 285-290; LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243-317; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 27-49; Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three and The Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 1-40, 210-231.

¹⁶ In the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, a significant contribution came in the late fourth century from the province of Cappadocia in the heart of Asia Minor (Eastern Turkey). The three leading figures here were Basil of Caesarea (c.330-379), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-389). These three bishops, bound together either by blood relationship or by close friendship, bequeathed to us a more relational understanding of God as a loving communion of equals.

added to one's being or substance, something which is ultimately dissolved in a cosmic unity.

By attributing ontological primacy to person rather than to substance, the Cappadocians were stressing that in God nature does not precede person; the 'one' does not precede the 'many' but requires the 'many' from the very start. There has been a paradigm shift in the classical understanding of the One and the Many away from the traditional view that gave priority to the One as the higher order entity. By placing the divine Persons on the same level as the divine essence, the Cappadocians stressed that God's essence or being is determined by the intra-divine relations. This meant that unity and multiplicity, difference and identity, in God are also on a par. It is not a question of simply replacing an ideology of oneness with an ideology of the many. The perichoretic¹⁷ unity of the Trinity is such that the mutual indwelling of the divine Persons does not detract from their diversity. In short, God is to be conceived neither as a collectivity nor as an individual, but as a communion, a unity of Persons in relation.

We can see some similarity between how human beings, as the 'image of God', should live in society, and how God exists as Persons in community. In such a vision, the sacredness of human personhood is highlighted. If 'nature' tends to point to the general, 'person' connotes uniqueness and particular identity. Just as God does not exist alone, the human person cannot exist in isolation, but only in communion with others. This is the existential significance of the Cappadocian contribution to trinitarian theology: it invites us to enter into a way of being that reflects how God exists.

The Trinity and Religious Pluralism

These developments in trinitarian theology have been incorporated into attempts by Christian thinkers to develop a theology of non-Christian religions. In the fragmented, multi-faith world within which

¹⁷ Perichoresis (literally 'dancing around') refers to the reciprocal co-inherence or mutual indwelling of the three divine Persons within the Trinity, while also evoking their distinct personal identities.



Abraham and the Three Angels by Marc Chagall

Christianity exists today, we Christians need a version of fidelity to our own identity and commitment which still allows us to be open to conversation and dialogue with those outside the household of faith. To be religious is to be inter-religious; faith is always 'inter-faith', always practised in relationship with others.¹⁸

Can a renewed trinitarian theology help us in this urgent task? Can the differentiations in the divine being that this theology stresses help to ground the need we Christians feel to remain committed to a particular manifestation of God in history, while at the same time being open to the presence of God in the creation as a whole, and particularly in other great religious traditions? For Gavin D'Costa, who has been one of the pioneers of such an approach, the doctrine of the Trinity affirms that God's own self has been disclosed in the historical particularity of Jesus, and at the same time acknowledges that God is constantly revealing Godself through history by means of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The Spirit blows where it will (John 3:8) and therefore cannot

¹⁸ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 1-19. See also Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 3-64.

¹⁹ Gavin D'Costa, 'Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality', in the collection edited by himself: *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 16-

be confined to Christianity. D'Costa's point is that this doctrine safeguards the particularist and the universalist aspects of Christianity; it reconciles the particularity of Christ with the universality of God's grace.²⁰

By maintaining both the particularity of Christ and God's universal action in history, the doctrine of the Trinity also guards against an exclusive identification of God and Jesus. Jesus is rightly called *totus Deus*, but never *totum Dei*, wholly God, but never the whole of God. It is through the Spirit and the Son that God is revealed.²¹ At the same time, Christians cannot speak of the Father without the story of Jesus. Father, Son and Spirit are distinct as well as united. There is a dynamic of the One and the Many at the heart of the trinitarian communion.

Moreover, if the triune God is active in other religions and cultures, then these religions and cultures can, at least in principle, challenge aspects of how Christians currently understand themselves. In its encounter with the other, the Church as it currently exists will be changed.²² Furthermore, in its commitment to learning from other religions, the Church should not set limits to what they might disclose, or confine the other within a pre-defined Christian space. The doctrine of the Trinity subverts the assumption that oneness and difference are mutually exclusive categories; more positively, it emphasizes that oneness and threeness are equally ultimate. Such a doctrine of God can serve as a powerful resource in dealing with the problems and challenges of religious diversity.²³

Trinity and Spirituality

Theologians currently writing on the Trinity have focused not only on the renewal of doctrine, but also on a trinitarian practice. An

29. See also his *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2000), 1-15, 99-142.

²⁰ D'Costa, 'Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality', 17.

²¹ The traditional Eastern criticism of Western trinitarian theology was that an overemphasis on the *filioque* jeopardized the full equality of the Spirit.

²² For example, S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), has proposed the thesis that viewing different religions as varied paths to the same goal should give way to the acknowledgement that these represent different ways to religious fulfilment and thus have different religious ends, some of which have little to do with Christian salvation.

²³ *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), x.

important backdrop to this development is the growing *rapprochement* between spirituality and theology.²⁴ This connection has not always been evident. Since the thirteenth century spirituality and theology have developed in separate directions, and the effects of this split are manifest in the rather speculative manner in which trinitarian theology was traditionally presented. We still hear the lament about the dichotomy between theology and life, between theology and spirituality. Theology is accused of being spiritually barren; yet, as Augustine and others have pointed out, theology's goal is not only to teach, but also to delight and to move.

We have pointed to a number of recent attempts to rethink the doctrine of the Trinity motivated both by a sense of the richness of

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Christian tradition and by a sensitivity to contemporary concerns in society and in the Church. All these studies show how Christian faith in the triune God is not merely speculative, but rather the foundation of Christian thinking, living and prayer. Further, a trinitarian spirituality eschews individualistic views of holiness that seem solely focused on the self or on its perfection, emphasizing instead how personal sanctification takes place through our relationships and communion with others, and viewing the ethical demands of Christian living in terms of increasing such communion among people.

The fact that Christians profess their common faith in the Creed each week is a regular reminder that faith in the triune God has its roots in liturgical celebration and experience. This is not the place to trace the liturgical roots of trinitarian doctrine, save to note that many phrases which made their way into later creedal statements derive from liturgical settings.²⁵ Traditionally, baptism was the normative way in which new disciples confessed the gracious power of the triune God, being baptized into the death and the new life of Christ and anointed

²⁴ Some recent works exploring the practical and pastoral dimensions of trinitarian theology (other than those cited thus far) include David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), and Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000). On the *rapprochement* between theology and spirituality more generally, see, for example, Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner* (Leuven and Grand Rapids: Peeters and Eerdmans, 1998), 1-40; Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998); Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

²⁵ See, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5.

with God's life-giving Spirit. This conversion of life, this radical turning to God through Christ in the Spirit, remains the experiential point of reference for Christian doctrine. God is encountered, experienced, confessed, before being reflected upon in more systematic concepts.²⁶ Of course, systematic thinking is an indispensable part of Christianity, but its purpose is to assist and promote the life of faith. Though the clause in the creed, 'who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified', may primarily be affirming the existence of the Spirit, it is also reminding us that we know the three Persons only in a context of worship and glorification.

The Orthodox tradition particularly has stressed that theological language is rightly used only in a context of praise, as doxology, and that we never fully comprehend the divine mystery that is the subject of our discourse. These insights need always to be remembered. As Catherine LaCugna notes, 'even words like "God" and "Creator" do not designate the essence of God as it is in itself but are "terms of address"'. The language of praise and worship is the primary language of Christian faith, and 'constitutes a way of speaking of God by speaking to God'. 'God is not a third party *about whom* we speak, but a Thou *to whom* we speak.'²⁷ There is always a temptation for theology to move out of the doxological mode, and to consider systematic concepts to be superior to religious images, symbols, and metaphors.

There have also been attempts to link a theology of the Trinity with issues such as suffering, forgiveness, community and authority. Here political, liberation and feminist theologians have again been to the fore. Moltmann, for example, though he has been criticized for making suffering central to the nature of God, has retrieved key biblical anthropomorphic insights about the divine suffering and about how God is affected by human actions and suffering in history. This is developed into a trinitarian theology of the Cross as an inter-trinitarian event, where the Father also suffers the Cross by virtue of being involved in it.²⁸ Moltmann accepts the risk of constructing God in

²⁶ For what follows, see LaCugna, *God For Us*, 319-375.

²⁷ LaCugna, *God For Us*, 326, 357, 359.

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974 [1972]), 206. See also his *Experiences of God*, translated by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 2000 [1999]), 303-312. Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 152-190, also explores the question of suffering and the vulnerability of God. Moltmann's trinitarian theology has been most recently criticized by David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 105-130.

human likeness in order not to reduce God to an impersonal concept which would be of little value to those dealing with the question of suffering in a pastoral context. Hans Urs von Balthasar also avoids the notion of God as unmoved mover, while trying at the same time to safeguard the transcendent nature of trinitarian suffering. Though for Balthasar this-worldly suffering is excluded from the transcendent God, he nevertheless holds that something like suffering is an integral part of the eternal trinitarian drama: the suffering involved in kenotic (self-emptying) love.²⁹

To sum up, the doctrine of the Trinity is not so much about supplying us with some extra information about an essence of God which we already know of from some other source. Rather, a living trinitarian faith can be understood in two senses: as *orthodoxy*, right belief about God; and as *orthopraxis*, the right practice or living out of this belief.³⁰ Despite the recent renewed interest in trinitarian theology, the impression nevertheless remains that the revolution in our image of God, in our conception of Church and society, and indeed in all our relationships, as implied in the doctrine of the Trinity, has yet to be developed fully.³¹

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²⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Volume IV: The Action*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994 [1982]), 319-328. See also Thomas G. Dalzell, 'The Enrichment of God in Balthasar's Trinitarian Eschatology', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 66 (2001), 3-18; Gerard F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

³⁰ LaCugna, *God For Us*, 368, 410.

³¹ I would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of Drs P. Endean, T. Dalzell, K. Duffy and G. Thiessen on an earlier draft of this article.